THE WRITTEN LAW

FRANCES G. KNOWLES-FOSTER

For my dear friend Miss Mary E Phillips, whose infinite patience and genius with both pen and pencil are my envy and delight, I remain always devotedly hers

Frances G Knowles-Foster

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Photo] [*Sarony*

Kate

THE WRITTEN LAW

BY

FRANCES G. KNOWLES-FOSTER

AUTHOR OF

"JEHANNE OF THE GOLDEN LIPS"

ILLUSTRATED

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FOREWORD

It must be frankly acknowledged that, in the present state of white public opinion in the East, the passing of such a law as that spoken of in this story is highly improbable. We live, however, in strange, progressive times, and just now the East is moving even faster than the West, so that to-day's improbabilities may be commonplaces in the To-morrow into which I have projected my tale.

In the meanwhile it will have served its purpose if it causes here and there a European in the Brown Lands to pause and reflect, "If it were so——" before plunging into a union which the imaginary law would make irrevocable.

FRANCES G. KNOWLES-FOSTER.

THE WRITTEN LAW

CHAPTER I

EXASPERATION

A BROODING heat hung over the Burmese jungle as the November sun sank behind the high trees and turned the sky's blue to flamy red and orange, and the sinking rays fell till they gilded the bungalow raised on its strong teak piles.

Ian M'Rosse, the young Forester, leaned against the little veranda's creeper-entwined doorpost, from whose top hung limply on the dreamy air a small Union Jack; and as he gazed northwards down the forest aisles towards Mingaing village, utter weariness showed through nervous expectancy on his face.

Only those who have lived on the Empire's farthest outposts can properly sympathise with his impatience in awaiting the weekly—often fortnightly—mail, with its probable disappoint-

ment of nothing except circulars, when at last the shiny-brown dak-runner has trotted in.

The bungalow which he shared with Angus Donalbain, his partner in teak forestry, stood deep in the jungle, perhaps a quarter of a mile south of Mingaing, a little hamlet on the Sonhla river, which, in turn, rushes south-westwards to join the mighty Irawaddi, where at the small port of Panshwe (Golden Flower), four miles distant, the steamer-calls link it slenderly to the outer world.

As Ian waited, he glanced idly round the room opening on to the veranda, where East and West shook hands carelessly. Two sides of the rough walls were hung with really beautiful native curtains worked in gold and silver threads with gay processions of little princesses, elephants, and pagodas; but the opposite walls' bare wood was pinned with pictures cut from European magazines. Long cane chairs stood by the rough plank dinner-table, but two exquisitely carved native tea-stools elbowed them on either side, and a great wooden store-chest, with a big padlock, filled with bottles, biscuit tins, and cigarette boxes, and above it a low shelf as sideboard, hard by the business-like rack of rifles, dahs (short swords), and spears. A superbly carved teak shelf held a cuckoo clock and some elephants' teeth; but Ian's eyes instinctively looked to the left side, where, below

two peacock-feather fans, an ivory frame enshrined a large photograph of an English girl, aged perhaps twenty-four, with very splendid eyes and a great deal of soft, loosely waving hair. Slightly irregular features, perhaps, and firm lines about the mouth, but a very fascinating face withal: the rather grave expression of the photograph leaving one, somehow, with a longing to see the lips lighted with the alluring smile promised in the large deep eyes.

Ian ruffled his hair with a hand still thin and nervous from his last "go" of fever, and sighed as he watched the track between the trees.

For November, it had been a particularly stifling day, and he was depressed by many accounts of logs drawn laboriously to the sweeping river, and the complaints of his elephant-men upon the depredations of an escaped tusker run amok; and now the suspense of the delayed mail touched every nerve upon the raw.

He waited another ten minutes; then from the roughly made table drawer took a shabby tin despatch-box, thence a letter, and, sitting in the nearest long chair, read its crushed pages slowly over, silently at first and then (sure mark of a man used to solitude) aloud.

"I'm sure you would rather I was perfectly

frank about my views of life and things generally. It seems only fair for me to tell you openly, when your ideas clash so loudly with mine. You seem to think I must readily give up my ideals, my work in the League, to think, with you, that a wife's first duty must be her husband's wants! My dear boy, you cannot expect the twentieth-century woman to be dictated to like that by her male belongings! Since we women became fully fledged citizens, we take ourselves seriously, and we have public duties to fulfil as well as private—work to do to help the Empire. Where is your club, you cave-man—eh? You know I love you, but to be known as a man's promised wife—a man who thinks like you—seems to my independent ears, now, a farewell to freedom such as I've always had. Two years ago, when I was in Burma, I was a more frivolous, foolish girl than I am to-day. Then, marriage did not seem so near—so binding a thing. But I care for you more than anyone—don't think I don't. It feels too awfully serious to put all in one letter, and I'm late now for the mail; but next week I'll write more and answer all your questions. Till then, my lonely Ian, with love, I am ever,—Yours constantly,

"KATE."

Ian felt his aching head hotter than ever as he said, half to himself, half to an

inquisitive black crow which hopped on the doorstep :

"Now, for all unreadable riddles, give me my beloved's mind ! What am I to gather ? Is it a passing pose, or is it the sheer cold truth that she is forgetting me ? Oh, modern woman ! Hopeless sphinx, most complicated machine ! Well, the mail can't be so long, and then I shall know, anyhow ! "

But desperation rang through "anyhow's" braver note. Deferred hope and sick heart were substance and shadow in Ian's being, just then.

His love for Katherine Iden was no sudden will-o'-the-wisp light, but a slow, steady, banked-up furnace, with the hopes of two years' letters, and at times little puffs of passing fears, to fan the glow.

In those days she had come to stay with her uncle and aunt, General and Mrs Iden, in their pleasant house near the Shwe Dagon, Rangoon ; and Ian, then on a month's holiday from the Upper River, had come, seen—and prayed that he might conquer.

When Katherine was about ten years old her mother died, and three years later her father, Colonel Iden, married again, one Gertrude Seyton, a very modern, very gay little woman, who proved an excellent stepmother, and of whom the girl became extremely fond.

Colonel Iden, however, while hunting, broke his neck, and his death left Kate very much her own mistress, for she inherited her own mother's money (in itself a comfortable sum), and, with easy-going Mrs Gertrude to back up her whims in most things, she had a very good time of it.

About a year after her father's death she went out to Rangoon with General Iden's wife, Aunt Nora, and there met Ian. Artistic to her finger-tips, as she was, the spell of the warm bright East captured Kate's imagination, and that love should come to her with rose-flushed wings seemed the final touch to her enjoyment of the romantic land.

She told Ian that she returned his love, but that she would rather wait a while and test her feelings wholly before announcing their engagement; and he, whole heartedly in love, agreed to any terms, so long as she gave him hope.

So they parted, and wrote each other letters which were distinctly beyond the limits laid down by Plato for affectionate comradeship, and which grew so gradually warmer that Ian began to think his happiness secure. And then, instead, the trouble began!

While he in his forest thought only of her, Kate's memories of him were being dimmed by a thousand distractions in the West.

Kate's stepmother, Mrs Iden, was a kind-hearted, frivolous little woman, who generally voted life's greater things bores and its trifles important; she had not accompanied Kate to Burma, and knew nothing about Ian, for the girl, with that curious love of secrecy which affects even strong-minded women at times, had never mentioned her forest lover—though they were usually close confidants. Perhaps her very love for him had silenced her, since she was uncertain how the more practical older woman might regard a penniless young Forester as a wooer — however charming he might be.

Then, suddenly, a sterner, loftier aim drew the girl like a magnet, and even caught her stepmother's interest, as few other impulses had ever done.

It was the good work done by the Feminine League, an organisation which, since the enfranchisement of women, had welded the formerly scattered units of their forces into one central body, potent in politics and a great driving power in social reform.

Its watchwords were "Charity, Purity, Security," and its members were certainly proving to the now rapidly dwindling section of alarmists, who had prophesied calamity under feminine enfranchisement, that they were sowers of neither sex antagonism nor domestic discord,

and that a woman could be a practical patriot.

They had opened the Bar to women, and now they were agitating for a Bill to empower women to serve on Juries in the case of female prisoners. The Women's National Defence Corps was a worthy sister-movement to the Territorial Army, which, with its regiments of well-trained, competent, alert women as scouts, surgeons, dispatch-riders, telegraphists, convoy-drivers, and coast-guards, was a most valuable auxiliary to its brother for home defence. They had secured several wise measures for the protection of infant life, and obtained more stringent application of the existing law for the suppression of the White Slave Trade, with a promise of further legislation.

So it is not to be wondered at that from Kate's mind, wrapped in the League's hundred practical interests, Ian was gradually drifting.

She and Mrs Iden were thrilled with enthusiasm as they went about lecturing, canvassing, or helping the poor from the League's charitable funds, and revelled in their sense of efficiency—it was so different from the old days when reforms were so slow and dilatory.

Kate felt like a strong young parliamentary candidate in the heart of a loyal constituency, as she assured the women in the slum of the

League's certainty to secure the Bill for the Weekly Inspection of Milk Depots; and as time passed the work absorbed her more and more.

This naturally was apparent in her letters to Ian, and hurt him—but he had patience and waited. Then he wrote and said that though, of course, the League's work was fine, he thought she might consider him a little more — but though he loved her too much to ever interfere with her private doings, he was now getting impatient to have his darling again. Could she not come out to Burma with General Iden's wife, Aunt Nora, who was then in England for the summer, when she returned to Rangoon? In reply to this she wrote the letter he was now reading.

In despair he had written back passionately imploring her to end his suspense and tell him once for all if she really loved him, as he could bear uncertainty no longer.

He put his whole soul into that letter, and he asked her to save him the extra month's anxious waiting by wiring him "Yes," or "No"; thus, judge of his trouble when, four weeks after its departure, the answer came, "Wait: Am writing! ! !"

Then followed four weeks' slow torment. In the hot jungle nights when he slept in a hut far in the wilds, with only his dogs, ponies, and

Kachin trackers for company, her image rose, torturing his very dreams.

Smiling elusively, the pale, cool shadow of her seemed to glide between the birchen scrub as he rode on his inspection duties miles towards the blue hills, with his rifle slung on his back, and his cream pony carefully picking its way along.

On the bungalow veranda he would set opposite him a great cane chair, and instantly her soft muslin frock (as he remembered it on enchanted afternoons in the General's Rangoon garden) would fill it, and he would find himself holding imaginary conversations in a way that would presently set him striding fiercely up and down, quite afraid for his own sense and reason.

His partner, Angus Donalbain, a very tall, very silent Scot of middle age, whose almost uncanny indifference to worry made Ian, indeed, suspect him of Buddhistic leanings at times, tried his best to help him by persuasion that women were only wavering bodies, and that presently Miss Kate would come to hersel' and to him.

But no effort of Ian's could push aside the idea that his fears of her refusal were well founded; and nightly and daily it wrought upon him, till once, he even got the *Rangoon Gazette* to see the homeward sailing lists, and weighed

the chances of ruin to their business if he left Burma at this season.

Dwellers in cities, leaders of sheltered lives, have no conception of the importance everything assumes in a lonely man's life in the wilds, nor how Ian's thoughts could affect his saner self.

His love for Kate was the greater since he had no near relations for whom he cared, for his father, whilst admiral on the Australian station, had fallen overboard in a yacht race, stunned by a swinging boom, and his death had so affected his wife that she died about a year later; and thus their son, living abroad from the age of sixteen or so, had drifted from the ken of any cousins.

He and Donalbain had so far managed to make a living by the tract of forest they rented, but, as the Scot said, "It needs a mon with twenty eyes" constantly alert against the forester's foes of ground fires, soft-woods, and tangling, climbing creepers which choke the young poles' growth, or lay the work of years waste in a day. Creeks that will not rise—fellers who go on strike—elephants which take French leave and run amok for weeks,—they fought them all, and in the intervals endured various attacks of fever, dysentery, and continual monotonously tasteless food. Yet, with the steady courage of the pioneer in the East,

they kept at it, and held themselves lucky to be free of debt and, moreover, their own masters and answerable to no man—a distinct advantage over the mere assistants of the great Teak Companies, or the Government men. Also they had the hope of good years, or that oil or jade might be found upon their land.

Now, as Ian looked down the jungle track, the sun dropped still lower, and its sudden golden glow threw up two quaintly assorted figures, making them unreal, stage-like, in the setting of shadowy trees.

One was a small brown man, his skin like polished oak, and naked but for a short cotton cloth—much shorter than the usual Burmese pasoh or kilt; with a battered tin box slung, opera-glass fashion, from his lean shoulders, and his huge flopping Shan hat flexible as a cabbage leaf.

By him, chattering, and gesticulating with eager little hands, walked a girl, a large flat yellow parasol behind her dainty, dusky head, the golden light through its oiled silk screen turning her to a very Danæ of the East. She seemed all golden, that slim, swaying figure—from small creamy ankles to pale golden forehead, under its heavy coil of silky black hair, held up by ivory pins and round pearl-inlaid comb; but as she neared, one saw that the

narrow silk lungi (skirt) tucked tightly round her hips was palest pink, and the short little coat of snowy muslin, while about its open neck floated an eau-de-nil scarf.

Her wrists had beautiful twisted gold bangles, and a large gold butterfly on a trembling wire pin nodded in her hair, as well as a spray of some white flower rather like wistaria, and round gold earrings of Shan workmanship stretched out the lobes of her little ears.

The parasol's shade whitened the deep old-ivory of her face, as did the contrast of her lips, blood-red with the betel-nut she had chewed; and her dark eyes were brilliant under the rather upward-slanting brows.

"Ah, thakin! you are foolish to have that mail-box locked up. This son of a lame buffalo was tired, and I could have been here long ago had he given me the letters. But we are come —and—hasten up, little beetle!—here is Than Dine with the biscuits, the soap, and the new lamp."

She stopped for breath as the dak-runner knelt before Ian in respectful shiko, slipping the box as he did so.

"Hello, Ma Twai Glay! What a clever girl you are to get back so soon! Anything fresh in Panshwe? Was the boat in to time? It's jolly good of you to bother with our shopping—I hope you finished all your own?"

Ian spoke English to her (though she had used Burmese), for she understood a good deal more of the white man's tongue than she could express herself.

Even as Ian unlocked the box and drew out the expected letter, he paused to glance at the weird little person who, pantingly, but with care, dropped from his bamboo shoulder-yoke two string nets full of odd parcels upon the floor. Than Dine, Ian's Shan-Burman lugale, or table boy, arrayed in a gaudy tartan cotton pasoh and emerald green shirt, his sleek black head bound with a pink handkerchief whose ends stuck up like rabbit-ears in correct Burmese style, was a grotesque individual, and the grin on his Mongolian features never altered, hap what might.

He shikoed, and would have spoken, but Ma Twai cut him short.

"I made him bring the things from the bullock-cart, for the coolie there is the child of an owl, and might have dropped the lamp or tea-cups. Put them carefully on the table, or may a Nat (spirit) fly away with thee, oh Than Dine, thou fingers of soft-boiled rice."

As Ian tore open the letter, she anxiously handed the net's parcels to her little henchman, who busily set them on shelf and cupboard; when suddenly a short sound startled her.

Ian was crouching forward in his chair, his head between his hands, and the crushed letter lay upon the floor.

Quick as a darting butterfly, Ma Twai poured a cup of water from the big red earthen chattie and, the very picture of an anxious nurse, touched his arm.

"Thakin! What is it? Evil tidings? Oh, you will have more fever—ah!"

His ghastly white face scared speech from her. Never had she seen him look thus, even in the worst nights of his fever, when she and her mother had sat up with him, lest he should go suddenly delirious.

"Leave me alone, please, Ma Twai—I must always be alone now," he said strangely. "No—fear nothing, but just give me the water and go."

With a Burmese woman's innate tact, she cleared off, Than Dine with her, and vanished, but only to squat waiting at the veranda steps' foot.

And Ian sat alone in the ruins of his dreams, feeling that his whole world was shattered. Every word of that wretched letter seared itself upon his mind, but he was as yet too crushed to feel the anger which would presently surge up.

Thus wrote Kate—carefully clear writing and absence of erasures, pointing surely to the fact

that she had copied it deliberately from a first draft:

"MOUNT STREET,
"*Friday.*

"MY DEAR IAN,—I have read your last letter over and over till I'm simply distracted. I hardly know how to tell you, I feel so loth to hurt you; and yet—the tone of dictation in your recent letters has hurt *me* enough. Two years ago my mind wasn't fully made up, and I warned you then, and now I owe it to us both to be brave and tell you before we are bound to each other. I feel now I cannot tie myself to you, or any other man.

"I couldn't stick the wilds in Burma for always, and it would make you very miserable when you saw I was ill in the climate or if we had any children and I had to keep bringing them home, and we'd drift into the ordinary semi-detached Anglo-Indian couple. I know this isn't sentiment, but it's sense, and to say 'Yes' and come to you would be unfair—while I felt like this. Try to see it as I do, Ian, and take it as little to heart as you can. I'm feeling it terribly—to have to speak the truth so plainly, and I know you'll be awfully upset about it.

"Only do, do please believe the truth—that I love you, but not enough to be your wife under

the circumstances. This has been a dreadful effort to say, but I am too worried to write any more to-day. Forgive me—I know you will in the end, for we've always been such good friends —and we always will, won't we ? 'Sister' is too silly nowadays, but when your worry has faded you'll still be friends, won't you ? Now, I can only end with all the sorry beg-forgivenesses I know, and am,—Your loving friend always,

"KATE."

Ian clenched the paper, then threw it away as if it burned, and laughed out suddenly, an eerie sound in the brooding hush, chiming discordantly with a faint patter of pony's hooves below.

Donalbain, very tired, very hot, in his jungle array of khaki knickers, putties, and once-white shirt, pulled himself up the steps and threw his quilted sun-topi violently at its peg as he spied his friend's face.

"Nay, man ! What is't ? " he cried, pulling his short, browny-grey beard—a certain sign of emotion with him.

Ian, fairly beside himself with trouble, did what he would never have done in saner mood, passed the Scot the letter and crossed over to the cigarette box with a mad effort at calm.

"Weel, weel ! " was Donalbain's only word as he laid it down.

His Scots accent was strong when he was excited, though normally unnoticeable.

"A nice shadow I've been loving all this time!" flared up Ian at last. "Was it Kipling that said—

> 'A fool there was, and he made his prayer
> To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair!'

That's been me, Angus! Me! Look at the cold calculation of her! See that letter all nicely spaced out and reflected about! She has time and skill to make her words into well-planned phrases, and to weigh all the petty disadvantages of being my wife—and I—I've been giving her my life, my soul! Two years, Angus! You know what she's been to me, don't you? I've been crazy! But I'm sane now! I can read her all through—oh, she's loved playing with me, writing me fooling letters, and wondering how it would be to be plain Mrs M'Rosse, the Forester's wife! But now, she's no doubt reflected it would be better to be Lady Something of Park Lane—get some other fool in tow and make sure to be rid of me first! Lord, Angus, but she was clever! If you'd been me, when she put her arms round my neck and told me she really did care for me, you'd have been fooled too! Last month's letter was to break the shock, and this to finish me off! Look at both! Anything'll do for an excuse. Why, I only said that if she married me she wouldn't have so much

time for trotting off to those accursed meetings of howling females—I'm sure I wouldn't have objected to it—sometimes—but no! She takes up what I said, makes me out the tyrant husband already, and uses it for the excuse to chuck me! I can't curse her properly—because I've loved her too long—but I can pray that some day she'll suffer what I'm doing now! There's no truth in the world, and there's not an ounce of justice! It's not as if I'd played her false in any way, done as many men in Burma do—lived with a Burmese woman—drank—played too much poker or got debts I couldn't tackle. Look at our lives, Angus, you and I! We've been as straight as two little schoolgirls all this time—the most honest pair of bachelors on the Upper Land. But I've done with everything now, Angus! Damn women!—cold white women like that! What do they know of the life here? The days when we talk to ourselves, and even an enemy would be welcome to break the awful stillness. Why does Providence—if there be such a thing—allow them to come into our lives if they're just to do damage to us like that, and then clear out scot-free—like her? Angus, I feel like going out and having a—shooting accident! No, I don't! She's not worth it after all, is she?"

He ended with a wild laugh, and the older man leaned forward and touched Ian's shoulder

gently, his voice very quiet and thick with his burr.

"Ian, laddie, don't tak' it to ye like that, noo! Lassies are a' the same — this way to-day, that way to-morrow! She'll be writing ye next mail to say she's thought she'll be Mrs M'Rosse after all. I don't say she's no' worth fashin' ower — she's the bonniest thing I've seen this twenty year; but she's just light noo. She'll come back, you tak' ma word for't."

"No, old boy; I've seen her as she is now. I feel I could never speak to her again—daren't trust myself to—if she stood here this minute—the false——" He checked himself sharply.

"Words aren't much good now, I ken," said Donalbain. "But hold steady and bide. Don't even answer that letter—let her do a bit o' wondering and waiting. It's no' wise to answer in wrath, and it's waur to answer in haste. What use would ye do if ye sat down noo and writ a' ye felt? Once—weel, it's lang enough since to tell noo—I writ to a lass in Inverness in haste—and if I'd waited a post I'd not have been here noo! Promise me ye'll no' write, laddie?"

Ian's eyes were apathetic as he answered.

"Very well. After all, as you say, it's no use."

Quietly he turned and closed his bedroom door upon himself, but no sooner did it click, than Ma Twai came up the steps.

She held very carefully some branches of the exquisite creamy "temple-flowers," and put them in two blue-and-white jars which held fragrant Chinese ginger from Bhamo.

Deliberately she went to the picture of Katherine on the shelf, moved it backwards as far as possible, and arranged the flowers to hide it entirely.

"Did you hear us, Ma Twai?" said the Scot warily, an eye on Ian's door.

"Yes, thakin. He spoke loud," whispered the girl, her expression very alert. "It is better to hide her from him while the madness is upon him. I could not understand quite all, but she will not be Thakinma M'Rosse, will she?"

She stood before Donalbain, her fingers locked together, her lids lowered to hide her eyes' gleam.

"It is a cloud over their sun—passing, I hope," he replied in Burmese.

But Ma Twai smiled faintly. Ian's tone had reached her woman's intuition, even though she had to guess half the actual words.

"No, thakin! The fires of anger will burn high between them. Perhaps as well, for she has a hard soul. Yet we will keep him safe, you and I, till he forgets."

She nodded confidently, and went on arranging her afternoon's purchases again.

Donalbain went out, found the brown dak-runner, and forbade him very sternly to post any letters in the mail-box during the next month without first bringing them to him—for both partners had keys for it.

Ian had promised not to write, but Donalbain, like his immortal compatriot Roger Kirkpatrick, had a firm belief in always "makin' siccar."

CHAPTER II

MEDITATION

THE late afternoon sunshine shone into another and more picturesque Burmese house on Mingaing's eastern outskirts, and lighted the burnished tin mirror of Ma Twai Glay, as she carefully twisted up her splendid hair.

The little house was as dainty and neat as herself: set high on carved teak posts, walled strongly with bamboo, and roofed with teak shingles, the very eaves carved superbly with figures and peaks, almost like those of a monastery; for Ma See, her redoubtable mother, had once been an honourable A-pyo Daw, maid-of-honour to dreadful Queen Supayalat in Mandalay.

Beautiful mats of black- and red-dyed theng (rushes) covered the floors and low veranda running breast-high along the house front; even the cocoanut offering to the guardian nat of the building hung in a richly embroidered sequin-glittering bag from the southern rafters.

The years had fled, the queen was in exile, but

Ma See had been lucky after the sack of Mandalay Palace, and a nice heap of silken tameins, velvet jackets edged with furs, filmy scarves of finest muslin, and gold and silver betel-boxes had been her share of the loot, after her terrible mistress had been marched off between her British guards.

She smuggled them into rice-bags, and at night got some Shan muleteers to bring them to the river. Thence to Upper Burma by hnaŭ (large native boat) was easy enough. Thus, her inner room now boasted of six big teak chests in which she happily rooted with sniffs of satisfaction whenever she felt her spirits lower than usual.

Her meek little husband, Moung Than, had died when Ma Twai was about ten, and Ma See had never replaced him, for a husband is rather a useless article in Burma, and she was saving up—firstly, to build a small poonjee kyoung, or monastery, and thus acquire the sublime title of "Kyoungtagama," female builder of a monastery; and secondly, to marry her daughter to the best advantage.

Ma Twai thought the first aim rather foolish compared to the second; but when one's mother holds the money-bags it is as well to defer to her, and her piety at the pagoda was exemplary.

She knelt now on the matted floor, thrusting slender ivory pins shaped like tiny billiard cues into the coil of hair, finishing up with the round comb in front. Then from a bevy of little

lacquer boxes she took on her pointed finger-tips wet thanaka paste, and besmeared her cheeks and low forehead, neatly avoiding the heavy sweep of hair.

By the time she had carefully touched up her sleek eyebrows with black ink, the paste was dry, and she rubbed it off again so as to leave a film of powder on her face.

Next, from the teak coffer she took her second best, pale rose lungi, and, with the one peculiar twist which holds without pins the narrow skirt, tucked it round her waist, and changed her muslin jacket for a finer one. As she slipped on her thin gold bangles her mother came in and squatted by her with a tired sigh.

Her wrinkled brown face was like nothing so much as a carved teak image, and her keen little twinkling eyes were deep set in a cunning forehead. She wore a green silk lungi (tamein is the ceremonial open-up-the-side skirt, lungi the every-day one) and a pink scarf, and in her ears blazed a fine pair of diamond nadoungs, once a gift from her royal mistress.

"Wherefore that lungi, my life ?" she asked.

"I go to the pagoda with flowers," said Ma Twai, fixing a rose in her hair.

"Have you seen him since yesterday ?" said Ma See, rubbing her hands together as if washing. Ill-natured people said that the friend of her parents (who answers to a godfather in Burma)

had named her "Ma See—Miss Oil," because she was a sayah (prophet) and foresaw this favourite gesture of hers, in which one could imagine one saw warm oil running over the sliding brown palms.

"No—but he often comes out at sky-shut to smell the air," said her daughter, and put on a pair of little velvet-lined slippers.

"Take those off," cried her mother. "If he sees them he might suspect you went to meet him. Put on your old leather ones. It does not do to show the tiger the pit!"

"Poo! He is too mad with thoughts just now to see anything but how I look altogether. White thakins do not see every hairpin, as we do. But you are my guide!" And Ma Twai changed the sandals.

"That was a rare chance we had, when he fell sick before, to nurse him," mused Ma See. "A man always likes the woman who sits by him when the fever runs. How looked he yesterday when the dak came? Tell me again."

"It grows late—I had better go. We can talk later," replied Ma Twai.

She took from a corner a curious flat rushwork platter, heaped with a pyramid of sweet-scented, golden-hearted temple-flowers, and the long bamboo handle of her large pink silk parasol in the other hand.

"I must go to the loom and finish Ma Pyu's tamein," said her mother, going to the far

end of the veranda, where stood the quaint ancient loom filled with a beautiful piece of checked purple-and-pink silk.

Ma See had been a maid-of-honour, Ma See was mistress of those chests and of a certain big brass pot safely buried under the northern house-post, and her ornaments were the envy of Mingaing; but the trading instinct is as inbred in the Burmese woman as the spending one in her Western sister. Thus both she and Ma Twai wove silk and sold it, and at the best price in the village, for Ma See knew the old Court patterns which would have meant lost heads to the wearers under the old régime, but which were now, under the British flag, considered quite smart.

When Ian had been down with his last attack of fever, Donalbain was away in the jungle, and Than Dine, alarmed at his high temperature, had called in Ma See for advice, and she, spying an unrivalled chance of winning the Englishman's gratitude when he should recover, promptly installed herself as his nurse. Both she and Ma Twai possessed the Burmese skill in massaging away pain, and their able hands relieved Ian of many an hour's neuralgia, so that even when he was quite well again, it did not seem strange to the village that they should occasionally visit the bungalow. Besides, Ma See had heard from her sister who lived in Mandalay that it was proper white people's custom to pay visits some-

times out of politeness; and so mother and daughter often dropped in upon the partners even when there was no need of their healing art.

The knack of choosing the most beautiful sites for religious erections seems common to the priesthood of every creed, and the chief pagoda of Mingaing was no exception to this rule, for its buildings were set like jewels in an inverted jade goblet upon a hillock in the jungle to the northwest of the hamlet; and the clearing round it, in a curve of the rushing Sonhla river, had the secluded air of the deepest forest.

The intense calm of the small open space, so appropriate to the gentle Buddhist faith, was broken only by the murmur of the Sonhla over its black rocks through the thick screen of the woods; and no one would have dreamed that only a few hundred yards away was a lively little village, full of barking pariahs and laughing brown babies, for the undergrowth is like a wall. Even the poonjee kyoung with its monks, which lay between the pagoda and the village, was invisible in that dense curtain of creepers and trees.

Three buildings stood on the hillock. Firstly the white votive reliquary pagoda, rising up like some gigantic elephant's tooth, smoothly curving to its snowy tip, which bore the umbrella crown of gilded wrought-iron, seeming from below finely bent as lacework, and its fringe of tinkling

[*Photo by Author.*

THE PAGODA OF MINGAING.

sweet-toned swele, or bells, wherein the river breeze made perpetual music as it swept above the sheltering trees.

A flight of white stairs climbed half way up the pagoda to what seemed a low door, but which was merely a shelved recess, where lay in state, covered with golden marigolds, the skull of the holy abbot whose merits had induced the thugis (headman) of Mingaing to build the shrine for its keeping.

Bushes of pale pink roses fenced the building's base, and a low white plaster wall, at whose little gate two leogryphs, open-mouthed, flamy-eyed, like monster cats, did sentinel.

A stone's-throw distant, rather lower down the mound, was the tazoung or chapel, elaborately carved posts supporting the towering peaked roof, whose every angle was richly fretted with images of nats, beloos, and with parading kings and elephants decking each straight beam or lintel, all in the glorious dusky teak, but coloured now and again, in eyes or trappings, which threw up in better relief, their wonderful details.

Within, above a low altar of chiselled stone laden with fragrant blossoms and rice heaps and small prayer-flags of bright tints on bamboo staffs, and below a white silk, gold-fringed umbrella, sat in majestic meditation a tall cream alabaster statue of the Lord of Peace.

The Buddha's serene face, with its brooding,

downcast eyes, its smile of eternal peace, and its calm hands in the stiff posture of the Renunciation (one pendant and the other laid upon the crossed knees), expressed most eloquently the tranquil spirit of the woodland shrine.

The ruby glass inlaid upon the statue's head-band sparkled softly as a misty star in the glow of the three clay lamps, which drove back the tazoung's deepening dusk.

A few yards from the tazoung a thirty-foot "prayer-pole," its gorgeous inlay of coloured mirror mosaic glistening with a thousand rays on the sinking sunbeams, lifted on its slender head the sacred henzada bird to heaven.

Amid the rose-bushes at its foot, were two teak statues, princes of old Burma, who, with raised arms, grasped respectively the head and tail of a long curly dragon, from whose coils hung a large bell, clapperless as usual, but with deer-horns lying below it for the supplicant's use, to call the Mighty Lord's attention to the coming prayer.

Up the grassy path, with her load of temple-flowers, went Ma Twai, and bent her glossy head to the ground in deepest shiko before ascending the steps to bestrew the holy man's relic with half their blooms ; then she struck the bell with a horn, and as its deep resonance spoke through the silence there was a slight rustle in the jungle, and Ian, parting the lianas, remained quietly watching the lovely little scene.

The girl's gracious figure in its pink-and-white robes, set against the soft shadowy background of palms, beside the quaint bell and glittering column (a shaft of light planted in the warm red earth), made a picture appealing so to his artistic Keltic side that, for a moment, he was loth to break the spell by speech.

But she did not see him, and, holding up her tray of white fragrance with that certain, imploring, offering gesture common to all votaries at shrines, turned away, bent like a supple lily, as she vanished into the tazoung.

He came forward and leaned over the pagoda wall, and, as he waited, another figure drifted under the carven eaves, silently as a wood sprite, from the jungle side.

It was a tall, lean old poonjee, clad in the faded yellow robe, bearing the palm-leaf fan and string of beads, his shaven head hairless as a dead skull; but the impression of death was counteracted by the steady shine of the eyes and the intense peace of the gentle old face.

From the tormenting desolation of Ian's thoughts during the past twenty-four hours sprung strange musings as he watched the tranquil glide of the monk—thoughts his shrewder half would have spurned for folly until now.

How calm they were, these strange brown people amongst whom his lot seemed cast! Had that old priest indeed found peace from the

world's woes with his ceaseless seeking after Infinite Annihilation ?

Nothing mattered to him but the steady pursuit of attaining peace.

Draped in his yellow robe, he had no possessive desires : gold and silver were useless to him, save where they did his brotherhood the alms to build a new kyoung or pagoda—and even then the workmen themselves gave most of their labour free to acquire merit themselves.

He had no aching memories of a fair face and deep-sea eyes looking into his—no sharp stabs of pain each time their reflection rose.

His conception of women was only as needful things to the scheme of human existence in a painful world, but that, as a Treader of the Eight-fold Peace Path, he need consider them no longer, save as shadows.

His very mother was now a dim memory—another atom on the Upper Road, valuable only for her spiritual merit. Even if she were dead, he had no sorrow, seeing that she must have entered another stage of existence (possibly as a man now) for her piety.

These monks, these servants of the Mighty Name, sought Happy Oblivion.

Oblivion ! It lured Ian's thoughts onward like a clue in a tangled maze, set vague memories of a noble poem (once grudgingly learned at school as a " literature exercise ") afloat in his mind :

"Never shall yearnings torture him, nor sins
Stain him, nor ache of earthly joys and woes
Invade his safe eternal peace: nor deaths
And lives recur. He goes—
Unto Nirvana—he is one with Life,
Yet lives not. He is blest ceasing to be—
Om mani——"

He forgot the rest, and started slightly with astonishment at the contrast of these thoughts with his usually optimistic trend of reflections. But the wonderful words echoed strangely all the same.

If it were true——? The elements of the country people's belief he knew, of course, but vaguely, and as every other Englishman does; but they had never struck him as being anything more than pretty superstition that one couldn't really take seriously.

But as he watched the old poonjee, he knew it for far more, and it drew his mind from its hopeless broodings better than all Donalbain's sane reasons and genial attempts at distraction had done.

And just then Ma Twai tiptoed gracefully from the chapel's shadow. She had already spied him, but feigned to start as she greeted him with a respectfully friendly—

"Shiko, thakin! I hope the thakin's health is improved. The peacock one meets by chance is fairer than that one snares for the palace."

"The pagoda needs no candles while you stand before it, Ma Twai," returned Ian, in the same

complimentary Burmese. "What did you pray for in there?"

Her eyes glanced downwards. Woman-like, she screened her prayer.

"I prayed to acquire Merit, thakin."

She was covertly admiring his well-shaped dark head, whose thick glossy hair was so much more to her taste than the odd reds and yellows of other white men's pates. Her thakin's was like a Prince of Mandalay's, indeed.

"Why do you want merit?" pursued Ian, slowly sitting on the pagoda wall.

"To attain the Great Peace—to end my painful lives and get to Nek'ban." But she was peeping at the strong muscles of his tanned wrist as he idly grasped the wall.

"Look here, Ma Twai: do you people really follow up the idea that all life is pain and nothing's worth anything?" he replied abruptly.

"Yes. But we have joy by the way, sometimes—not the calm joy the poonjees tell of, but the kind that brings its weight in pain. I cannot well explain, but shall I call the Uncle-Lord (reverend monk) that he may tell you, thakin?"

"No—no! You will do quite well, Ma Twai," answered Ian, a sudden British repugnance to letting the native know he took any interest in his ways checking his curiosity for the moment.

"You see, the poonjees say we pay for all the world-joys in pain," went on Ma Twai. "It is

the Wheel which rolls and balances everything. So that, since we pay for pleasure with pain, I often weigh a pleasure over and enjoy it, because I am simply put back a little on the Upward Path to pay for it. It does not matter—I have time in this life or the next to acquire more Merit and regain what I lose."

A whole philosophy lay in the girl's simple words, and, as she stroked a rose-branch into place on the wall, Ian gazed at her attentively.

While she had spoken the low, earnest sentences she had seemed a statue of pale bronze, the impassive incarnation of the mysterious, apart, old East. But as she ended, a quick crimson afterglow of sunset warmed her face, revealing her a woman thoroughly alive, and whose poppy-red lips were smiling radiantly at him.

For the first time since the news of yesterday he smiled back.

"Why think poonjees' thoughts, thakin?" she said quickly. "They may make you the more sad. Will you not come to the pwe we have to-night? My mother has asked Oo Shwe Bwin, who is host, to send Donalbain thakin the packet of pickled tea (lepaik—invitation). It will be a very good pwe. Prince Kway Yoh is here on his way to Mandalay, and there is no better actor of princes in the Upper Lands; and Ma Pan sings Princess. And old Ma Poo, the Myouk-Ka-Gynma, the monkey-dancer—no monkey in

the jungle is lighter than she! But the sky is shutting fast—I must go home or the bell-clappers of the gossips will say I speak too long with the thakin."

She gathered up her rush-platter, and he walked with her down the track.

"I can leave you at the first house, Ma Twai, but it is very dark down here; you might see a beeloo (ogre) or get bitten by a nat."

He laughed lightly, but the girl shivered and clutched at a little charm she wore under her arm.

"The thakin is too brave. It is not well to speak of the nat kindred," she stammered, paying the ogre ghouls he named the compliment of spirit's relations, to appease any chance one listening.

A shadow fell across the path, and a sharp rustle broke overhead. It was only a wild peacock flying home to roost, but Ma Twai, with a little cry, clung shaking to Ian's arm.

Quickly came a picture of Katherine one day when they were with her uncle in camp and a snake reared up in front of her. She had neither screamed nor started, but killed it adroitly with her cane. Yet, oddly, the masculinity of Ian found Ma Twai's silly timidity a pleasant thing just now. And a man's first detrimental comparison of his idol pulls a nail out of her altar.

He drew Ma Twai's hand over his arm and laughed.

"We had better walk home as our thakinmas do with us at dinners."

She turned up a reassured face, but drew her fingers away.

"No, no, thakin! It is not our custom—but see, I will run very fast. You will come to the pwe?"

She clutched her lungi and, at an almost incredible pace in her clacking sandals, scurried off towards the village, leaving him musing down the way.

"No fellow at home could believe how this place grows on one," he said, half aloud. "The jungle's a cage, a trap, for a man who's dreaming of England and—— But if England were to be wiped off the map, there are worse places, particularly in the cool season.

"Good Lord! what a complete break-up of theories and resolutions to be a practical, common-sense fellow, one big shock like mine does make in a man! It's not as if I were a philosopher, like Donalbain, who takes good, bad, and indifferent things with the same solid 'I dinna fash mysel'.'

"They're happy, these people here, in spite of what Ma Twai calls poonjee-talk. Egad! I've a good mind to talk to the old abbot at the kyoung yonder, and see if his ideas are as peaceful as the monk's face looks.

"I wonder what on earth makes the spell of the

place? I really begin to think that those fellows who settle out here altogether may not be as mad as I've always thought them. There was an old man who retired near Mandalay with his native lady to spend his remaining days there. Said his folk in Europe would have forgotten him after so many years away, and she looked after him better than any of his nieces would——"

Then he resolutely pushed back the rising thought, disgusted with himself at his own weakness.

"Ugh! Shows it's better not to give way to thoughts like that. Fancy saddling myself with Ma See as a temporary mother-in-law, just because of Katherine's refusal! But I'll go to the pwe to-night, for it will keep me from thinking a bit. Oh, but a big trouble's like the creeks—you can dam them back as high as you like, and, just as you think you've done it safely, up laps a wave over the top again."

He walked off towards the bungalow at a speed which suggested a race with his pestering meditations.

CHAPTER III

DIVERSION

THE velvety tropical darkness, spangled above by stars and below by floating fireflies, fell closely over Mingaing, while little lamps like glow-worms peered from the bamboo houses.

The acrid smoke, so characteristic of evening rice-fires in the Orient, pervaded the air, and the big bats whizzed from eaves to trees on their nightly expeditions.

Upon the open land in the hamlet's heart, preparations for the pwe, or operatic drama, were proceeding leisurely, yet with a certain zeal, for had not the village troup secured the famous Prince Kway Yoh, the Mandalay star, to shine among them ?

Near Rangoon, where Burmese customs degenerate, and where the Sahib Log are inclined to treat the natives more in accordance with the manners of their kind in India, these pwes are different, attended mainly by the curious "griffin," or eager tourist; but in good old Upper

Burma, where the Burmese are, as yet, unspoiled, the White Rulers understand them for what they were originally—the most dignified, if the merriest, people of the Middle East, and thus accept the village amusements' invitations, much as a squire at home will patronise the choral society's meetings.

There is a very pleasant, homely, general participation in these rural plays, and a sympathy exists between actors and audience found hardly anywhere else in the world, albeit the critics are promptly and Elizabethanly frank in their opinions, and do not hesitate to correct the faulty actor there and then.

The stage, a wide ring of mats spread over the warm earth, had its centre marked by the usual branch of a flowering tree, round which the band had arrayed their instruments ; firstly, the drum case, a wonderfully carved, painted, and gilded round wooden paling, surrounding the drummer, a gaily headkerchiefed little man, whose nimble brown fingers, thumb, and wrist, thumped the ten-graded drums with boisterous joy.

Another elegant carved frame of two fierce-faced beeloos held up a curvy teak snake, in whose coils swung a bright chime of gongs—neither bells nor gongs exactly, but whose player's leather-padded stick tingled them sweetly.

Just out of elbow-reach, sat the pattala player, or bamboo slat man, with a curious high-ended

case of wooden slips, like a detached piano keyboard, and tiny mallet to conjure forth clear melody.

The soung-loo with his strangely shaped, silken-stringed harp, the soung-kouk, leaned by the drum-case and chatted with the cymbalee, whose hands and feet were both laden with brazen cymbals of varying size.

Round the stage mats' edge glowed a row of saucer lamps with brilliant lotus-shaped shades of paper, and from posts stuck further back, torches flared gaudy yellowish flames in the silver moonlight.

On one side of the circle's edge the three actresses crouched by their elaborate Pagan lacquer toilette boxes, holding their mirrors to the lamps and chattering like so many crows at dawn; and the male actors did alike, varying it by chewing betel.

Every house around was lighted with extra lamps to keep away the evil nats while the family was at the pwe, adding no little to the Rembrandtesque effect of the fantastic flitting figures like moths about the lighted circle, against the dusky forest background, and, above the trees, the large moon smiled down pleasantly.

All Mingaing was there, and many people had brought both babies and sleeping-mats. Some were attended by a small child, whose duty it was to keep awake and rouse its sleepy client at

the act he wished to behold, for these pwes go on till daylight, and, after all, what is the good of boring oneself with intermediate scenes which do not appeal to one ?

Everybody brought trays of cheroots or curious sweets, or gourds of Kachin beer and weird kinds of cordials, while two young girls with a pretty movable lacquer stand of betel-nuts, lime, and areca, were much in demand. And everyone had their wraps, from beautiful Chinese fur-lined coats to mere blankets, for the temperature drops shrewdly by midnight; and several children had lighted a ground-fire and hired out hot stones at a tiny fee.

Foremost among the pleasant excitement was old Oo Shwe Bwin (Uncle Golden Blooming), the thugis or headman of Mingaing, the giver of the pwe, a very dignified figure in his pure white old-man's pasoh and handkerchief, talking to the policeman, whose undress array stamped him of Kachin race, his Mongolian features suiting well his Chinese-cut fur dolman above a ruby silk pasoh, the whole costume oddly crowned by a khaki Government turban.

His wife, a bustling, chubby Kachin woman, in her gala gown of dark blue embroidered linen, with bamboo hip-hoops much riveted with silver studs, fussed about, assuming the hostess to a degree which seriously annoyed Oo Shwe Bwin's wife Ma Shwe, for, after all, it was her

husband's pwe, given in honour of the building of the new foot-bridge over the Sonhla.

Five or six long chairs had been placed for the white guests, as two Government forest assistants and the Superintendent of Police from Koung Kyouk, ten miles away, had been asked to ride over, as well as our two partners of the bungalow ; and therefore Madame Policeman of Mingaing bethought her that her official position deserved a higher seat than a mat. She sat fanning herself languidly in a chair, and budged not for all Oo Bwin's expostulations, and her henpecked husband very wisely found a naughty little boy to chase in the distance, leaving her to poor Oo Bwin, whose distraction deepened, for the thakins could be heard laughing through the trees.

Ma Shwe, as hostess, they might have tolerated in a chair, but this fussy Kachin——! To lay hands on a woman is a grave offence, but suddenly Oo Bwin had a brilliant inspiration, and whispered it to his two active sons. They made one spring forward, carefully turning the chair round, back to stage, and then, as Madame Policeman jumped off it, indignant as a roused leopard, they sneaked the chair aside altogether, and, in the confusion of the honoured guests' arrival, her husband returned to pacify her.

With Ian and Donalbain came O'Prentice, the Superintendent, and the other Foresters, and their talk was cheerful, of sport and the timely flooding

of creeks. They greeted Oo Bwin and Ma Shwe, and, accepting lighted cheroots from his daughters, sat down, nodding to the eager, welcoming shikos of actors, actresses, and picturesque audience. But the first crash of the band had not sounded when a Kachin tracker, a wild, weird figure in brown jungle-made coat and heavy, withe-bound green-braided dah slung from shoulder, came forward and squatted down respectfully before the group.

"Go on," said O'Prentice impatiently, as permission to speak.

He turned his hard brown palms outwards on his knees in the Burmese way, as his haunches rested on his ankles, and shikoed his head well forward.

"The Lords of the Forest have not heard there is meat for their delight close at hand? Behold, there is a huge tigress in the jungle by Nan Chin creek, five miles away. I saw her yesterday from a teak-top whither I had climbed to take my bearings. I waited, but she went away. To-morrow I can lead the thakins to the place, if they will."

His wrinkled, oaken face grinned delightedly as the white men's interest showed.

"Now, M'Rosse—you're our crack shot! Here's your chance; I can't go, for I've got a rotten inspection coming off to-morrow," regretfully said O'Prentice.

"We might have a beat with elephants," said Donalbain in Burmese to the tracker. "But to-night is for the pwe. You may come as guide and shall have rupees if we kill." Then, in English to the others: "You'll come too?"

"Yes, of course," from all the Foresters.

"The thakin is my prince," said the Kachin eagerly. "But besides the gracious rupees, may I have the beast's whiskers? It is for a charm."

"All right," laughed Donalbain, and the Kachin sidled back to his place.

With bang, bleat, and shriek, the music began, and the old monkey dancer belauded of Ma Twai stepped forward from beside the drum, where she had been busy putting thanaka paste on her wooden skin in the intervals of smoking her white cheroot.

A thin brown creature in a cream-coloured silk lungi, sewn up at the side-opening usual in the true tamein, narrow as a sugar-bag from hips to sandals, topped by a tight muslin jacket and floating pink shoulder scarf, garlanded by strings of mock pearls about her neck, her black hair strained high on her head, with its gilt comb stuck through tiara-wise therein, old Ma Poo sprang into the circle.

She leapt her own height in one agile bound, miraculous in the tight bag she wore, threw her head backwards, giving the fantastic screech of the animal she acted, and sprang down again,

cowering like it, for another leap. Her gestures were simian to the life. She gibbered, she japed, she bounded gleefully, snatching at imaginary cocoanuts in the air; her skinny arms, twisting fantastically backwards, caught at a vague tail, mocked a fellow ape, as faster and faster she leapt in the wild steps of the dance, to the eerie twanging of the primitive harper and the clash of cymbals.

Her bones seemed double-jointed and hinged by wires, and the apish grin and jabber of her shining brown jaw left no humanity visible. She was the leaping jungle monkey itself, hopping in its forest home.

Then, quite as suddenly as she began, she dropped on her knees, bowing her head forward, and when she raised it, she was smiling her woodenly calm smile, old Ma Poo, the respectable dancer once more.

The white men laughed, but rather uneasily, as the audience cheered.

"She's a clever old girl," said Donalbain, "but she's uncomfortable to see. Reminds one that Darwin knew too much. I wonder how old she is? Must be about a hundred and one in the shade."

He said a word or two to her and turned to the others.

"Goodness! She's only fifty-five rains, she says!"

"It's quite a relief to look at Ma Twai," said one of the other Foresters.

Ian looked at Ma Twai as she glided from the darkness beyond the lighted ring. She was a complete contrast to the bony-framed, sharp-elbowed and shouldered Ma Poo; the girl's rich pink silk tamein was tucked tightly, showing the easy swell of her hips, and the soft curves of her bosom lifted the embroidered muslin coat, while her cheeks had a delightful dimple as she smiled at the company. A gold pin in her glossy coil of hair held a dangling bunch of purple wistaria over one ear, with its emerald and pearl nadoung, and her gold daleezan necklace (from her mother's hoard) glittering in the torchlight. She, smirking and bobbing with pleasure in her daughter's beauty, pattered behind her, in best blue velvet sandals, and silver-embroidered green tamein.

"Ma Twai's the belle of Mingaing," said O'Prentice, smiling and motioning them to sit on the mats near them. "I wonder she's still single."

"She's flying rather high, I fancy," said Donalbain in a low voice. "None of the boys hereabouts will satisfy her mother, who has a bit of an old stocking buried away somewhere. I shouldn't wonder if she married a big elephant contractor or rich storekeeper in Mandalay. They talk of going there sometimes."

"She's quite worthy of anyone," said the

impressionable Irishman, trying, without much success, to get a special smile for himself from her.

Then, to the boom of drums and clash of goungs, the famous Kway Yoh, the Prince of the piece, stood forth, gesticulating heroically, an imposing person, in his gorgeously striped pasoh and pink and gold handkerchief (goung-boung) and richly sheathed dah, slung from a silver-tinsel shoulder belt. The basque of his muslin coat was cut into fantastic points stiffly wired upwards like wings round his hips, in the ancient royal fashion of Burma. With training he would have had a fair tenor voice, but the wild bawls and trills he now emitted, blended with the orchestra's weird music, scorched the ears of the white listeners.

In impassioned verse he declared his despair at the loss of his adored Princess, doomed as victim to an ogre, who devastated the province ; that she refused his suit for fear he might share her fate, but that he feared no ogre alive and would take all risk.

To console the Prince, got up from behind the drum-stand the Court's Prime Minister, a sturdy basso, in a purple velvet pasoh and emerald green jacket, who cheerfully insisted that all would be well if the Princess would only leave her hiding-place in the palace and speak to the Prince.

That lady handed her cheroot to Ma Poo to finish, and swayed upon the stage, her tight, sewn-up tamein trailing after her in a little two-foot train, the wired points of her jacket bobbing gaily as she came.

She broke into passionate song, flinging wide her arms in despair, swaying, supple as a snake, from throat to heels, every muscle expressing emotion, every gesture of her long fingers on their elastic wrists speaking plainer than words the fierce sensations within her.

Across her dark mobile face flitted shades of feeling as varied as the flickering flares of the torches which lighted the strange stage, and struck sparks from her jewels and tinsels. She was tender, she was wroth, she was indifferent, in rapidly following flashes, as she twisted and swayed her pliant form like the creature of some dream, her long arms curving in stealthy, sinuous, feline movements.

Her voice, unearthly strong, wailed weirdly moonwards in a wild appeal to the outer Powers to check her sorrow—and then, addressing the Prince, glowed warm with the near earth's passionate joys, to the throbbing drum-beats.

Ian gazed at her fascinated, as the uncanny lights of lamps and fires gleamed or eddied in smoky wreaths over her fantastic shape with its rich robes and shining crown, set above the mysterious onyx of her shining eyes.

She was only a village dancer, but she seemed to him to reveal infinite things: the subtle voluptuousness of the Burmese mind, the boastful royal pride which restrained the Princess from ceding to her lover, distinct from the following womanly longing, promise, and sudden access of bashfulness—she showed all perfectly in every action. Even had Ian known no word of Burmese, it was internationally plain. The clear, passionate, primeval cries of the Beginning of Things triumphed mockingly over the lack of music in that untrained melody. Her slim, turning, twining hands wove spells redolent of the East's eternal deeps.

She fixed her eyes on his as she moved in that strange slow measure which hardly lifts the feet from the ground, yet which is tenfold more expressive than any birdlike hoppings of a Western ballerina, and smiled slowly, wonderfully. Then she veiled her face shyly as the Prince again strode forward.

He beat time impatiently as her voice dropped; then, with drawn dah, cleverly feigned to cut the screening silk, mocking her shy recoil with vivid gestures and singing thunderously.

"Why shrink from me? You women do but live for love."

From the wild, motley, shadowy throng round the circle loud laughter and keen applause tingled to the quiet stars and indigo sky.

Strange new sensations were creeping through Ian as the laughter died.

The Princess extended both hands in a last appeal to her lover, imploring him to have patience. Her tones throbbed in thrilling entreaty to the darkness—and his mingled with it, a triumphant, virile, even threatening call to all her senses.

Prince Kway Yoh was very justly famous from Bhamo to Mandalay for his dramatic powers.

The actions, voices, and time dragged Ian's wavering mind along—drew him, set him rebelling at the slavery to patient love for Katherine which had held him so long. It shone a lurid light of unrewarded endurance upon his conscientious resistance to the temptations of the land, climate, and opportunity, all of which he had crushed down ; it made his scruples weak, insensate things which a man might heed no more. . . .

And even as he thrilled to it he saw Ma Twai, and, as his cigarette was extinct, smiled, and indicated her long cheroot, its end aglow.

With a courteous assent, she moved across and offered the light, and as she bent towards him, the perfume of her hair and scarf floated to his nostrils, mingled with the heavy scent of ground sandalwood and aromatic gum which the children had thrown on the fire.

Her upturned eyes narrowed and dilated like a sleepy child's as she moved towards Ma See, who was hiding her delighted grins in the deeper shadows.

Strange desperate thoughts surged up. Katherine's pale ghost was driven back. She was lost to him through her own cold, callous fault. Let her go! A thousand young men in Burma had, before him, yielded to that compellent call, which is one of the strongest forces in the world, and if he made the next among their ranks, what mattered it to any but himself? He was answerable to no one, unless it were Donalbain, whose moral outlook was sterner, but who, after all, was not the keeper of his conscience.

Then he damned himself for a fool. After all, the Burmese "wife" of a white man was but a toy—and knew it. Divorce was easily paid for, by a gift to the girl, and such divorce was held no shame by her.

Then suddenly came a check to his musings. O'Prentice rose and took out his watch, and the Princess stopped singing like a switched-off machine.

"I must be moving home, you fellows," he began, when suddenly the Kachin tracker advanced and shikoed once more.

"I should have told the thakins that there is a lind (tree cradle) near where I saw the tigress,

and one thakin could go with me to it," he said. "It was built by a travelling thakin who got fever and went to Bhamo last week."

"By Jove! Isn't that like a native to save it up till now?" said O'Prentice. "Well now, who's going to sit in the lind? If we have a kill there, and the beast's keen on it, we had better try that, before we bother with a beat. We can have the elephants if the lind-man fails."

"Let M'Rosse have a go," said one of the younger Foresters. "He's the neatest shot on the river, and I've promised my mater I would not use a lind; my father was killed in a machan in India—overbalanced himself—and so it got on her nerves about me."

"No—let's draw lots—I'm not going to wolf such a splendid chance," replied Ian.

"Wait a bit," said Donalbain quietly. "Let's draw lots. But we'll draw in a jolly new way. Hand me that piece of sacking, policeman! Now then, two of you people hold it up so. We'll all get one side of it and hold up a finger each, and Ma Twai here shall shut her pretty eyes and turn round blind and touch one—and he's the man that goes!"

Amid much laughter and pushing about they got behind the improvised screen, and Ma See, bandaging her daughter's eyes with her scarf, lightly turned her round thrice, to the tune of

jests and joyful finger-cracking (Burmese sign of glee) by the crowd.

In the hush that followed she stood before the screen, and the small fingers of her right hand curled themselves round one of those held up. Then, as her mother withdrew the scarf, she choked back a short cry of dismay. She had taken Ian's finger!

CHAPTER IV

DANGER

THE machan or "lind," as the Burmese call the curious bamboo cradle perched high in a tall tree's branches, was not so far away as Nan Chin creek, but in the jungle, about two miles from Mingaing, and perhaps a couple of hundred yards from the rushing Sonhla water.

It was a solid little structure well lashed into the tall teak, twenty-eight feet from the ground, standing in a small clearing in the gigantic kine grass, and across this, in good range, lay the "kill," a dead buffalo calf.

Early next morning, Than Dine had a happy hour cleaning Ian's guns and arranging his ammunition, as he sat upon the veranda, informing the passing boys of his acquaintance that his thakin would certainly slay the tigress with one barrel. Was not his thakin known to be the bravest man on the Upper River? Did he not once ride eighty miles through the awful Head-Hunters' tracts of jungle, without

any cartridges, alone, but for his great dog? Did he not pull Falconer thakin out of a crocodile-haunted creek?

Late in the afternoon Ian set out, accompanied by MaGan, the Kachin tracker, and ten or twelve villagers, all armed with sundry weird dahs and guns, some of the latter being much more dangerous to aimer than aimed-at.

Short planks floored the machan, and Ian also laid down a razai or quilt to deaden any sound he might make, and soften the long, cramping waiting to his legs. He was further armed with a tin of sandwiches, a flask, and a novel, and, climbing up into the queer cradle, laid his two guns carefully on folded rugs beside him.

The Kachin, armed to his great pride with a new gun of Donalbain's, and hugging his betel-box in his tunic folds, shinned up the higher branches and perched on another couple of planks and some folded sacking.

One of the Mingaing Burmans brought a tiny kid, whose string collar he tied to a stake near the "kill," saying its bleat was a quicker draw than the smell of the dead calf.

Then, with a chorus of good wishes, the little band departed in the dusk just as the moon began to rise over the forest. Soon her rays shone brightly through the leaves, and Ian could even read his book's big print; but it was not exciting, and he fell to listening idly to

the sounds of the jungle-folks, furred, feathered, or quilled, as they moved above or below. In the stillness rose the unending monotonous rhythm of the frogs' croaking in some little pond near, and once or twice the sharp squawk of a cross monkey pinched awake by its peevish wife; and a troop of wild boar trotted into the dense undergrowth.

Bats whizzed between the gently shaking foliage, meeting the quaint little owls, and once the call of a wild peacock, close at hand, tempted Ian to fire; but naturally he resisted, and fell to his uneasy thoughts again.

He had blessed this chance of sport as a wholesome escape from his trouble, but just now, in the waiting, it rose up again and cut like a knife. With all the philosophy he could muster, he argued, like Donalbain, that time must mend his wound, and his long habit of "being straight" fought hopeless abandon bravely. Hurt pride, helped by the intolerable loneliness of his life, framed Ma Twai's face in a glow of consolation. He dared not think how he was going to endure the long grind of forest solitude without his guiding hope. He dreamed of going to Mandalay or Rangoon on leave, and then knew it to be folly at this season just when they were so busy with the logs.

He pictured Katherine, meanwhile, indifferent to his fate, going about London, laughing,

talking, and eager over her many interests, thrusting his very memory aside as an interference with these important details.

He stifled a queer sound in his throat as he remembered where he was, and luckily, for just then the little kid drew his attention. With a shrill bleat of utter terror it jumped up so hard that it snapped its staking stick, and slipped away like a rabbit into the long grass.

Silently as a shadow, Ian sat up and drew a gun to him, waiting—until he was stiff with tension, and, thinking it a false alarm, was about to lay it down again, when suddenly there was a hollow cough in the long kine-grass to the left. A tiger's cough, once heard, is a sound never forgotten ; there is a chilly ogre's gruesomeness, a ghastly scrape and " ough " in it, that marks it from any other bestial sound.

The moon showed the dead calf clearly across the clearing, and as Ian watched the dark grass edge by it, a huge soft head peered out, sniffing the air. It was the tigress of Ma Gan's promise, the terror of Nan Chin district.

The great lithe body crept forward, its tail quietly tapping the ground, and smelt at the dead calf cautiously. She was a royal creature, this jungle queen, a ten-footer, as Ian guessed, even then, and she crept round the clearing, smelling the earth, and padding carefully as if on sharp thorns. Out of the grass rolled a tiny

furry ball—a cub. It went to the calf, and the mother looked at it, then deliberately sat down on her haunches and gave a profound roar. She faced the machan now, and Ian's chance was come.

As her big jaw opened in a slow yawn, he took aim at her chest, a neat even shot which would not spoil the skin, but, as her head dropped quickly, the shot passed through both mouth and breast and out behind.

With a fearful "waugh" of agony, the great creature jumped up and down in two short hop-jumps, which landed her back in the tangled kine-grass. With scared squalls the cub scuttled after her, just as a second chubby, kitten-like striped ball rolled into the open, and after them, in a trice, into shelter.

"She must die, the thakin's shot went home," said the Kachin very low.

As he spoke, the grass swayed heavily, and Ian, spying a peep of solid fur, fired. A series of terrible growls told him he had judged well. Then the grass was still, the silence complete.

"I've got her, Ma Gan! But it's a nuisance having to sleep up here," he said to the Kachin aloft.

"Yes, but the thakin knows he must not leave the tree. Just as the first shot went off I seemed to hear another stick snap behind us here. Her mate may not be far. No man knows

the jungle folk's numbers," said the tracker earnestly. "But if the thakin can sleep, I will watch."

Ian drew down his brown mosquito veil, for the insects were maddening, but with a sense of joy warm within him. That one quick shot had waked the true hunter's lust, and hushed for the time all other worries.

"To-morrow I shall make offerings of a fowl to the nat of this tree," said the Kachin seriously. "It is a very good nat that we have had victory so soon."

Ian smiled. "I wouldn't waste the chicken on him if I were you, Ma Gan," he whispered back; but the man grunted with disgust.

"Ameh! The thakin knows it is not good to speak lightly of nats," he said nervously. "I shall tie leaves together, and offer rice too, for he may be a Hnin Nat——"

"What's a Hnin Nat?" asked Ian curiously.

"He is of those nats who shake men in the forests, so that they become mad," replied the Kachin. "One can never be too careful with the unseen things."

Then they settled into silence, taking turns to doze off, until dawn began to peer through the branches; but no sight or sound of anything tigerish occurred. When the sun shot long gold spears upwards, Ian raised his revolver and, as arranged, fired twice, to signal the Mingaing

watchmen that he had wounded, but not killed, the beast.

With a scratch band of drums and goungs, most of the unoccupied villagers turned out to escort the hunters back to safety and breakfast—from big Moung Tha Kwe, the crack native shot of the hamlet, grinning benignly in his good fur coat, down to little Moung Twet, aged seven, Oo Bwin's youngest grandchild, in a lemon and purple checked pasoh, allowed to come for a treat, with his little brass goung.

Amid this bevy of brown and yellow admirers, Ian got down from the machan, but, though he searched the clearings, did not examine the long grass on foot.

"We had better get the elephants, and come back after I have eaten," he said. "Donalbain thakin will come too, and we will search for her, and perhaps find her mate too."

The chorus approved, and, everybody talking at once, set off for the village, Than Dine proudly laden with Ian's guns.

"Hurrah, laddie! Got her? I thought you would—tell me all about it," said Donalbain, drinking very hot tea, as they entered the bungalow.

Between mouthfuls of breakfast Ian told, but as he ended, the Scot swore.

"I'm just one shake of fever the day! It's no use taking the other elephant off work for

me. Two will be plenty, and the beaters will do the rest. You and Tha Kwe can polish her off without me, well enough—lend him my other gun." Indeed, his hand shook aspen-like as he lifted his tea-cup.

But he noted Ian's alert, roused air with deep satisfaction.

After all, there was great magic in the open jungle.

"Greenwood to cure greensickness," he told himself, in the old Highland words.

An hour later Ian, followed by Than Dine and another lad with a small armoury of guns and revolvers, set off along the main street.

From every hut's compound or veranda came the cheery early-morning sounds of Burmese households—clack of silk-looms, pounding of rice mortars under girls' active arms; and smoke from cooking fires drifted bluely in the still, sunny air. Handsome Ma Pyu, squatted on her veranda, was rolling cheroots in their white palm-leaves from a tray of mysteriously mixed wood and tobacco, leaning out with a pleasant flash of white teeth to greet Ian. And in the next hut, Moung Gwa, the sandal-maker, ceased his little hammer's tapping to shiko, as he crouched busily among his flat-soled, gay toe-strapped wares.

As Ian reached the open space, little Moung Twet beat his goung to call the muster, and about thirty eager sportsmen, with a truly weird

assortment of weapons, and another dozen beaters and hangers-on, who love nothing better than the wild thrills of a tiger-hunt, collected amid the chaffings and encouragements of the women, who joked the gun-owners freely about their pride in them.

Among them came Ma Twai, smiling and fresh as a pagoda rose. No one would have guessed she had not slept all night, but for uneasy snatches, between constant gettings-up to peer from the door, or trim the lamp she had lighted to the House Nat for her idol's safe return.

Now, as he swung towards her in the cheerful dawn, her relief was beyond words; but a Burmese woman's tongue is never tied long.

"Thakin, you are the pride of Hunters! You saved us from the Striped Ones like a nat!" she cried gaily to him.

"Yes, I got the old wretch all right. She'll eat no more people. We're going to meet the elephants by the big rock yonder, and bring her in. She must be dead after my two shots."

Ma Twai took her courage in both hands.

"I have never seen a dead tiger close, thakin. I wish I were going too."

"Well, you might come along with the beaters. It's quite safe, I think," said he carelessly.

She beamed acceptance, as she chattered beside him, the proudest girl in Mingaing that morning.

They took the broad cart-road out of the village for the first part of the way, through the flat rice-fields, where the shining lines of the irrigation channels marked them chessboard-wise in the sunbeams.

The party's approach raised a flock of gabbling green parrots from the ribbony rice, freshly dew-gemmed by the night, who fluttered into the infinitely soft blue of the morning sky.

Across the field the farther forest waved refreshed green banners to the bright new day, and, farther again, the Kachin Hills' glorious blue line rose like some dream wonderland against the horizon.

A quaint, thick-wheeled cart, laden with "jaggery" in big bamboo baskets, and drawn by little fawn-coloured trotting bullocks jingling with bells, and between them, on the pole, a bunch of scarlet hibiscus flowers in offering to the Journey Nat, came creaking along from the weekly steamer at Panshwe. The whole land seemed so peaceful, so domestically rural just here, that it made the terror of last night among the long deep grass seem an impossible nightmare.

Beyond the cultivation a belt of low birchen scrub ran, where the doves cooed and big butterflies flapped painted wings over sandy soil; the ground grew more broken; they turned off the main cart-track to a narrower one leading to the

rock where the elephants should be, at the edge of the thicker forest.

"What's the matter with Ma Gan?" asked Ian of Ma Twai. "He does look glum."

She spoke rapidly to the Kachin sombrely trudging behind, and answered:

"He says he wishes the thakin had not spoken ill of the Tree Nat; a black dog howled as we left the village. He fears things——"

"And the missionaries think they'll teach these people," thought Ian.

"Don't mind him, thakin," said Ma Twai hastily. "See, the day is good, the air sweet. Who shall harm the best shot of the land? Even I, who am timid, fear not to come in the jungle with you."

They reached the big rock towering over the low birchen wood, but no elephants were there. They sat in its shade and waited, but after half an hour Ian wearied. It was dangerous to send a single runner into the deeper grass in the direction they would come from, so, fuming at the stupidity of the missing elephant-oozis in misunderstanding his orders, they began to retrace their steps to the village under the now hot sun.

A hundred yards away a small tree reared itself over the others by a sandy nullah, and a big branch, which looked good foothold, tempted Ian to risk a climb and see over the lower jungle if the missing elephants were in sight. Three

Burmans followed him closely, carrying his guns, while Ma Twai waited, smiling with the rest, on the path as he plunged into the birches.

It was not a stone's-throw from the track, and he had just put one foot on the lowest knob, just got a hand on the tree-fork to swing up, when a loud scream from the nearest Burman was followed by another from Ma Twai. He turned his head just in time to see a scurry of flying cotton pasohs from behind him, and a vast striped flash bounding towards him.

In a second he swung into the fork—above it, on to a swaying branch twenty-five feet from the sand,—and then realised horribly that utter panic had seized his gun-bearers, and that he was alone up the tree looking down into the face of the enraged tigress, still very much alive and terribly active. Her every detail printed itself on his memory in that tense instant before she sprang up—the yellow teeth slavered with blood from her wounded jaw, her bristling white whiskers, the ardent death in her fierce bronze eyes.

She leapt up, clawing savagely at the tree trunk—missed, and fell down howling with pain.

Ian shouted wildly for Ma Gan—Moung Tha Kwe—to shoot, to be men—but panic reigned, and no sound came. It was maddening! There were a dozen loaded guns within range, and not one man would steady himself and fire!

Again the great cat sprang, again missed—but the slender tree quivered with the double weight as she lurched upon it.

Ian sought in his belt for his long hunting-knife, but it had slewed round to his back in the climb, and before he could draw it, she jumped a third time—and landed on the fork, not a yard from him, reaching out her terrible forearm like a human thing. . . .

He wriggled desperately for the knife as her claws neared—touched his thigh—knew himself falling. . . .

Like a scoop of little daggers, her claws sank in the flesh—and, with an awful wrench, man and beast fell to the ground, luckily man on top!

Ian always remembered the strong smell of hide and hair which seemed to fill the air as they rolled over in that fearful struggle, literally wrestling together in the sand. The frightful grin of her wounded jaw as she nosed for his throat was sickening to see, and her four armed feet, as she clawed for his shrinking body fore and aft, were as the very hands of death.

He clutched at her head with his bare hands, wrenched at the strong cords of her neck to keep those dreadful teeth from his throat, when suddenly she turned and bit deep into his thigh. In the agony, he did not even feel a second claw wound in his calf.

He tore wildly at her jaw—got his hand, God

knows how, into her open mouth, wrenching at it viciously. Both were now mere maddened animals.

Then, just as he felt the jaw slip, something else lighted on top of them—a slender steel dah darted a quick, fierce shower of stabs into the tigress's body, ending in one in the lower throat as the beast laid it open by raising her head to face the new foe.

Ian, his hand free, grabbed at the wound in the shoulder (made by his second shot last night), and hung on like a bull-dog.

Ma Twai drew out the dah, and the great cat's mouth filled with blood; coughing chokingly, she rolled away from the man's exhausted frame —rolled over, clawed in the air, and the girl, quite heedless of the dangerous paw, struck home to the heart with her little weapon.

Then instantly she threw up her hands with a frantic scream. Utter panic set in, close on her spurt of fine courage, and she rushed into the scrub, head down, hands dangling, as if from a demon.

Then only the Kachin tracker screwed up enough pluck to creep from the nullah's shelter and empty both barrels of Donabain's rifle into the yellow and white furry breast.

He shouted loudly for the rest. "Cowards! Sons of kullah mothers! I have slain the beast! Come!"

The chattering circle surrounded the motionless Ian, but for quite fifteen minutes he stirred not. Then he grasped the situation again and sat up, cursing them vigorously : shame-flushed, they stared at him, as one possessed of a spirit, when he tried to stagger to his feet.

With white lips he cursed their ancestors, themselves, their children.

Unnatural strength, born of his anger, enabled him to stride a few yards towards the Sonhla, knowing that water was the first aid for his dripping wounds and their poison.

A twittering voice struck his ear.

" Thakin—oh, thakin ! I am here ! Do not leave me ! "

Ma Twai ran from the terror-haunted scrub, dreading to be left alone.

" Give me your arm, Ma Twai ! You're worth a thousand of these beastly cowards ! They're the shame of Burma ! Sons of hares ! You let this weak girl do your work and save me ? Your faces are blackened for ever ! " raved Ian, catching at her shaking hand as they ploughed through the grass to the stream.

It was not far, and his fiery strength just lasted out till he sat down in a lapping, shallow pool. Ma Twai recklessly stripped him and bathed the ghastly wounds—seven in all, from thigh to ankle, where the claws had almost laid the bone bare.

She wrung her hands and sat down, weeping passionately as she finished.

"You will never heal them, thakin! Oh!—oh! —I knew it was death Ma Gan meant when the dog howled! Ma Gan, thou evil nat! It was because thou dost hold the thakin a doomed man, thou didst not help him! May you never attain Peace!"

"It is true! I knew he would die," replied the Kachin brazenly.

Once let panic set in, and the Burman will shamelessly confess his fears, though in peace there is no more boastful man alive. The dismayed chorus of cowards now knew no better than to stand gaping.

Ian smiled faintly as the humour of the girl's Job's comfort struck him. Then he turned on Moung Tha Kwe, now kicking the sand with a nervous sandal.

"Go—run—to tell Donalbain thakin to send my cot quickly out here—take me to the bungalow—I——"

His voice murmured off, and, as he sat there in the cool shallow, his head dropped against the bank, and he lost consciousness again, and did not feel Ma Twai raise and hold him carefully till Donalbain arrived.

CHAPTER V

OCCUPATION

"THERE! I'm through!" exclaimed Mrs Iden, throwing down her elaborate silver penholder on her dainty Sheraton desk, and stretching her long lace-sleeved arms about her shining auburn head.

"Don't say I'm not helping the League, Kate."

She scooped together a great pile of envelopes full of circulars inviting the Leaguers to a coming conference in the Albert Hall, and rang the bell sharply. As the servant carried them off, she yawned.

Katherine, very busy with a heap of coloured ribbons and pretty metal badges, smiled up at her.

"You *are* a dear, Gertie! If only everyone would help as quickly as you. But there's always such a lovely feeling of good deeds in what we do, isn't there? And to follow such a woman as Mrs Cawdor is to feel victory in sight all along. Wasn't her speech fine yesterday?"

Her stepmother crossed one smartly shod foot

over the other and leaned to peep out of the window into Mount Street before answering.

"Yes, magnificent. And I liked her frock so much, too. By the way, Kate, what had we better wear this afternoon to go to the meeting?"

"I'm wearing my dark blue coat and skirt and a big black hat," said Kate.

"Well, I'd thought of my heliotrope cloth dress and ermine set," replied Mrs Iden, "but I've just seen Miss Forres, and she says that she's really afraid we shall have some trouble. She was down in Poplar yesterday, and she says there were a lot of roughs and slum women having a kind of meeting, and they said they wouldn't have a lot of damn fine ladies being juries on them. Luckily for Miss Forres, some police came along and dispersed them, but she was so sure there'll be a fuss that she called and told Inspector Kernes, and he is putting extra men on to guard us to-morrow. They might pelt us, and that heliotrope is so sweet——"

"Oh, well—I always like to go well turned out, anyhow," retorted Kate. "It's so ancient to go frumpy, like the Advanced Brigade of the 'Eighties. And you couldn't martyrise your frock in a better cause, could you?"

Her changeful blue-grey eyes glowed affectionately as she jumped up and caught her stepmother round her little waist, standing before the mirror.

"Only, I do hope they won't throw eggs," murmured she, pathetically.

"Still, after all, one can't make omelettes—even parliamentary ones—without breaking eggs," ruefully; "and someone must suffer," this with the air of a Perpetua.

Kate laughed, amused at the heroic pose, for, although gay Mrs Gertrude helped valiantly in the League's work, her stepdaughter had often slight misgivings as to its lasting above a year or two. She had had successive fits of movements, great and small, from South African War nursing to Christian Science, and now, from Kate's fever for the work, she had, as it were, taken a slight rash.

"We look a frivolous pair of politicians, I'm afraid," said Kate.

"Never mind! Our hearts are in the right place, as Sir Thomas Moore said—wasn't it him? Oh well, Raleigh—somebody said so, anyhow," returned Mrs Iden, examining her well-preserved face carefully in the glass.

"Positively there's a new wrinkle in my eye corner. I'll have to get some stronger cream from Helena."

Then she looked at the girl's reflection keenly.

"But you—oh yes, I can quite see you as Joan of Arc, or somebody thrilling. I wish you could do Joan in some procession or other, Kate. Your figure's simply cut out for nice tight chain mail,

and your head's just like the 'Republic' on French coins. You could let your hair down, too—it would look awfully well."

"If anyone overheard us talking, they'd think us two silly females," said Kate bluntly.

"No! It's business to make up well for any part you play. People with a fad get famous, if only they work it hard enough, and dress for it. Be sufficiently distinctive, and the public applaud. Nobody remembers Henry VII., but everyone knows Henry VIII. for his six wives, and it's my belief Lord Roberts will go down to posterity as the general who hated cats. It even impresses the mob if you're smart—just remember Lady Colme's big hat that won the election for her husband, by distracting the Opposition women's attention and preventing them rushing the platform. Still, it seems ridiculous to have to need consider one's frock to-day, quite like the bad old days when women went with petitions which weren't heard to the House, and got chucked out. We've got the police with us now, fortunately, but of course, poor fellows, they can't always stop the mob if they *will* riot. I mean to find Mrs Menteith, and we'll go and have tea together after the meeting's over; and we can call on Marie Sinel—I must see her about her speech for Thursday on our way home."

"And I think I'll wear the heliotrope and risk any fuss."

She ran out of the room, gaily singing a snatch of the Marseillaise.

Kate glanced about her reflectively.

It was all very dainty, very modern, and very quiet. From the table littered with silver and tortoise-shell trifles, a picture of Mrs Cawdor, the General of the League, smiled at her and deepened her thoughts. This quiet, motherly woman had, in the early days of the League, given up her time, her money, and her strength to its noble cause, and as Kate eyed her serene face she felt that to follow her was only her plain duty. An illustration stared out from the front page of *The Leaguers' Lantern*—a young woman in prison garb, a poor young mother who, driven to despair by desertion and disgrace, had been tried and condemned by a male jury for abandoning her child, while the true cause of her trouble went scot-free, and bore nothing of his victim's burden.

It was in aid of such as she that the meeting in favour of jury-women that afternoon had been organised, and at it would be present a number of similar ex-prisoners testifying to the urgent need for reform.

Below the first picture was another illustration of a dozen idiot and maimed children, the fruits of the union of the unfit, poor little nightmare figures, for whose elimination from the community the League was also striving, by its

crusade for the segration of the feeble-minded and deformed. And the knowledge that she, Kate, was a lieutenant in this valiant war against sorrow and disease was a thing to thrill——

"There's a great magic in the union of earnest spirits all pushing together," she murmured. "It's even drawn Gertie to make herself active, and help someone beside her giddy little self."

Then the date calendar's white face startled her.

"Friday! I must be writing my letter!" and as suddenly stopped short at her desk, remembering that now she need write no more for the Indian mail, and that henceforth there would be no more cheerful lines from Ian on Saturday mornings. With a little pang she tried to push this thought away, and found consolation in the fact that all her own envelopes from people would still bear the free "Miss Iden," instead of the domestic "Mrs M'Rosse."

A mind-picture rose swiftly of Ian standing by a little forest stream near her uncle's camp, smiling happily, and offering her his hands to jump across, and she sighed.

She had loved Ian more than she had guessed, and yet so many circumstances had combined to quench her love since they had parted. In two years of London life the loving, trusting child in her had developed into a clever, colder, more sceptical young woman, who did nothing

in haste, and who examined everyone's motives with keen eyes.

Her experiences explained one cause.

Amongst them had been the marked attention of a rising young surgeon, who thought that her income would be most helpful to his career; and also there was a prominent barrister, aged forty-eight, tired of living alone, and convinced that Kate's tactful manners would exactly suit the part of hostess at his little dinner-parties. Again, there was a pleasant man-about-town of forty-five, who found her fresh youth more charming than his usual flirtations with married women; and after him, a flighty young poet, who wrote delightful love-letters for a whole month.

Kate heard them all out with calm interest —interest which turned to quick disgust as each one's motive revealed itself. Ian's love had been different—yes—she hoped so—but still, these affairs set her analysing him also, and as he was far away he could not plead his honesty.

In opposing her devotion to the League, Ian had done the very worst thing he could, for the modern Kate makes a quieter but sterner resistance than the Kate of old to Petruccio's checkings. Kate was no shrew—had not an ounce of the nasty wrangling girl in her whole being, but she did value her ideals and her freedom, and to risk losing either was dreadful to her.

When Ian had expressed his differences of

opinion with her so plainly concerning the League's aims, she feared he would be unsympathetic in other ways also; and she pictured in lurid hues the severe test her patience would undergo in the mental stagnation of the lonely jungle.

And yet—his former devotion and ardour, and constant thoughtfulness for her every wish, seemed to give this fear the lie.

But no! She had made her choice, had written to him firmly, finally, and must abide by her resolution. This was a momentary weakness—her regrets would pass with time, of course. Now she must go and prepare for her errand that afternoon—surely a better thing than any mere love-dallyings!

On the wall above her was the picture of one of Cromwell's young Ironsides grasping the standard, and as Kate's gaze fell on the keen, stern face she unconsciously smiled back into the eager eyes.

When Kate and Gertrude walked down Piccadilly that afternoon the winter sun was shining quite gaily through the clouds, and the absence of wind made the day almost like September.

They had promised to call at the Minerva Club on the way, to pick up some fellow Leaguers, and so went on foot, finding themselves in a stream of other women bound for the Albert Hall, as they neared Hyde Park Corner. London

was getting accustomed to sudden feminine overflows, but to-day it was a deeper current than usual, and pretty well every class of woman was represented in the crowd which streamed westwards. They crossed over by St George's Hospital, and as they reached the pavement from the east, twenty mounted police paced slowly into the Park.

Lady Dunsinane, a pretty fair-haired woman with an eyeglass, and Miss Forres, sharp-featured, bustling, and an able speaker, were pleasant company, and chatted of their various doings since they had last met. Kate and Gertrude were so absorbed in what they said, that it was only by a sharp push from a passing newsboy's bag that the latter noticed how thick the people were getting.

They were just by Albert Hall Mansions when there was a loud noise on ahead—a great waggon lumbering by with planks and timber stopped suddenly. There was a rush from apparently everywhere, of roughs, boys, and women—such women as are rarely seen in the West End. The waggon driver was dragged from his perch, and the long planks toppled off in all directions on to the roadway, effectively barring any motor from driving over them. Next, with yells of delight, the roughs rushed towards the steps where the Leaguers and orderly public were entering the Hall. It was all done so quickly,

and with such energy, that the police round the doors and across the road were powerless to prevent it, and their reinforcements only reached the spot just after the last plank fell. Naturally, the traffic stopped dead; the people seethed in the blocked space, and in two minutes the quiet roadway was a pandemonium of noise and confusion.

It was plain that the proposed reform was not to succeed unopposed, and that its objectors' protests were active.

A great big dock labourer sprang upon the top step—pushing off a couple of ladies and a small boy, with such violence that they sprawled on the lower ones—and shouted at the top of his voice:

"No damn jurywomen for me! Men, it's the thin end of the wedge! If they try women they'll soon try men! Stop it in time! Men for men—no petticoats a-hangin' of us!"

A bellow of pain cut his shout short, for a woman in the League's colours sprang up and buried a hat-pin point neatly in his shoulder, and as he leaped at her a policeman jumped between them. From the sides of the building rushed more of the mob, white-hot for a riot, and determined to interrupt the meeting by storming the Hall—costers, dockmen, out-o'-works,—and in another minute the scrimmage was general.

Police whistles screamed out, and batons flashed whitely here and there. The next thing Kate saw was the face of a tall, fierce woman immediately in front of her, and a red fist shaken close to her eyes. She gasped for a second, it was all so unreal, so like some bad dream, and then the people behind her rushed forward, carrying her and Gertrude like foam on a wave-crest towards the park railings, as they swayed and struggled. The excitement grew wilder as, just then, a troop of Guards on their way to Knightsbridge were spied through the trees beyond.

Lady Dunsinane was carried away from them —Gertrude just saw her catch appealingly at a policeman's belt; and Miss Forres who, squaring up, sent a big boy who clawed at her clumsily flying backwards. Kate felt a rough hand on her shoulder, and saw a grinning coster trying to pull her back. Next she noted that the women of the League had rallied like soldiers, once the first surprise was over, and were making for the Hall doors in as compact a body as they could, for the enemies who tried to prevent them with hoots, kicks, and linked arms, defiant of the police, who could not at first charge for fear of injuring the women.

"Take your dirty paws off," she shrieked angrily. "Let me alone!"

The man's temper rose, and in a trice he

raised his hand to strike her, when some unseen force from behind sent him staggering against the rails, and, slipping, he fell under the hoofs of a police charger, which pushed its insistent bay flank against her. She tripped backwards and found herself caught up in somebody's arms and swung neatly into the cleared space behind the horse. Catching her breath, she looked down, and was sensible of another hand—a nice clean hand—round her waist, most protectingly.

"Steady—don't faint, please!" said a voice, which matched it admirably.

A very tall young man was smiling down on her—smiling from ear to ear in a wide boyish way.

"So glad I just caught that rotter on the hop!"

But as he spoke Kate saw in front of her Gertrude, struggling with a horrid-looking woman in a greasy red coat, and whose hair was flying in wild wisps, and she would have darted forward to her aid, but he did not loosen his clasp.

"It's my stepmother—do help her!" she gasped, and then she saw another tall youth with him, whose red hair gleamed in the sun, dash to the rescue.

He pulled the woman off Gertrude in an instant, and lifted her bodily to Kate's side. They both laughed as she mechanically put up her freed arms to straighten her hat.

"Look here," said Kate's knight-errant, "you've got Beau's latchkey, Banq—let's go

in there out of this. Ah—the police at last—hurray!"

Another row of bobbing helmets was seen sweeping up from the east, and, without waiting to either apologise or explain, the two youths snatched them up like dolls, and the next thing Kate knew was that they were all standing laughing and panting in the hall-way of one of the Mansions' sets of flats.

"Don't be angry, please," said the spokesman. "I knew we'd get shelter here, and my friend has his cousin's key, luckily—we can get in and wait till the row's over. This way."

They entered a flat on the first floor, whose hangings, pictures, and easels showed it was the property of an artist, and at last Kate had a good look at her friend in need. He was very tall, but one could not call him handsome, for his nose, though straight, was too short, his jaw too square, and the mouth too wide. He had, moreover, a long cut by one eyebrow, but his big blue eyes had long lashes darker than his hair, while his whole person said "thoroughbred."

"Un beau laideur," flashed through her mind as she summed him up.

"Oh—oh—wasn't it *awful*!" exclaimed Gertrude, as she caught sight of herself in a Venetian mirror. "How good of you to pull us out—I really can't thank you enough. That horrid woman—I was afraid she'd claw my eyes out—

just like a dreadful revolutionary story. You stood up to *your* man, Kate ! "

The other youth had been peering from a window in the room which opened beyond the studio.

" The good old bobbies have swept 'em clear ! " he called cheerily. " I can see the crowd running away now—and they've shut the big doors—some Guards have joined in, and are drawn up in front now ! "

" Would you like to get into the meeting ? " asked the other, smiling genially. " I don't advise it, though—you've had enough for one day, I think. Please do sit down five minutes and recover—and may we introduce ourselves, as the occasion's really rather extra ? "

His breezy, boyish manner was irresistible, and Gertrude smiled back very sweetly.

" My name's Ulf (silly name, but my old ancestors had it) Hume-Bolingbroke, and my governor's General Hume-Bolingbroke, and we live down in Dorset. I'm home from sea. And this is my pal, the Marquis of Banquor. And why we happened to be here just now is because his cousin, who's an artist and has fads, had just gone away and shut up house and left a miniature he wanted with him on the table ; so he posted Banquor the key and asked him to pop in and get it. Thus, we had just done so when we got mixed up in the row yonder."

"I'm one Gertrude Iden of Mount Street," replied she, falling in with his humour. "And this is my stepdaughter Kate, whom I beat as a religious duty every day! We are both ardent Leaguers, and don't care what we do when we're on the war-path."

The men both laughed at this, as Kate's smile turned Gertrude's nonsensical statement of her character as the traditional stepmother to ashes on the spot.

"How many times has she had you up for cruelty before a magistrate?" joked Hume-Bolingbroke. "I don't like magistrates myself—even when you know them well. I think they're worse when you do. I've just been run in down at home for speeding—only 45, too—with my car, and hauled before my own important papa, who both fined me and endorsed my license. But I've got even with him by hiring another car and chauffeur and sending him the bill—that is, he won't get it till I've gone to sea after Christmas!"

They could not help laughing again at his frankly revelling, bad-child chuckle; and Gertrude's laugh was particularly gracious, for she was, before all things, a social woman of business, and she had met Banquor's mother, the Duchess of Caithness, at a meeting, so that the prospect of knowing her rather better was charming, as she would shine nobly among her collection of celebrities. Gertrude collected not-

able folk as acquaintances, much as other people do stamps or china.

"So you're real, ardent Leaguers," said Ulf reflectively. "This is a rare chance for me to ask questions. Do you do it because you like it or because you feel you must—for conscience' sake?"

The words from anyone else would have been almost impertinent, but he had "such a way wid him," that Kate could only smile back and answer, while feeling somehow rather goody-goody:

"Because we feel it's our duty to help a good cause."

"Evidently it's your Point," he replied, his blue eyes dancing with fun. "Everybody's got a mad point somewhere, you know. Banquor has—about the weirdest I've ever heard. He's an authority on goblins. Yes, goblins!"

"Explain, please," said Gertrude.

Banquor blushed to his sandy hair.

"Ulf's a brute for splitting," he said. "But it's true—I've got about the finest collection of goblins—hob, nob, and chimney goblins—in Europe. I like 'em because they're queer and funny and nobody else likes 'em. It's so common to collect old pots or pictures, and one gets fearfully swindled" (Scotchly), "but I've yet to see the man who can do me over either a goblin drawing or yarn."

"He's got a whole roomful of pictures of them,

and crowds of little statues and books full of tales about them," struck in Ulf. "When he goes abroad he's missing for hours, and his mother always knows where to send his secretary to find him—in the village witch's, or the oldest peasant's hut, jawing away, to elicit the deeds of the local goblin. My mad point's nothing so thrilling—only boxing. I nearly won the Squadron's belt last year."

But Kate meanwhile had slipped to the window and was peeping out.

"It's almost quiet again," she cried. "They've picked up all the planks, and the motors are running all right, and the police are sitting there like monuments. Really, riots are strange things—just like fires—blazing up, and being quenched directly there's enough water brought."

Gertrude rose and joined her, and then said:

"We must be going now, and really I don't know how to thank you, you know—er——"

But Banquor, who had been rooting in a beautiful old Chinese lacquer cabinet, turned round, and triumphantly swung in the air a small greenish bottle of strange shape, with a cover of coloured grasses curiously woven.

"Hurray! Here's a bottle of Beau's famous liqueur! He gets it from some unspeakably remote monastery in Spain, and it's the best stuff you ever tasted. Do have a drop, Mrs Iden. We'll weep if you refuse."

He had snatched up some sweet little moorish coffee cups from their shelf and poured out some of the liquid before they could refuse, and then, as they put it to their lips, Ulf said daringly :

" Here's to our next merry meeting ! You'll allow us to call on you some day, just to see how you've survived this adventure, won't you, Mrs Iden ? Please do—we're really quite respectable, m'm ! " with a droll imitation of an errand-boy.

" Well, I think I must," smiled Gertrude. " But now, if you will see us across, I think we ought to try to get into the meeting. I'm anxious to hear Mrs Cawdor's speech because I suggested parts of it. And it doesn't come on till nearly the end."

" Very well—I'm sorry we can't come in to hear it too, but we've got to go into Long Acre to see a man about a new aeroplane Banquor's getting," replied Ulf.

They reached the door of the Hall, and when Kate had shown the blue-coated janitor her League badge, the two youths departed. As they went, Ulf shot a long keen glance straight at Kate, and she returned it readily.

" My dear, what nice blue eyes he has ! " said Gertrude, voicing her thought. " They quite strike one."

They did—they haunted Kate all through the meeting.

CHAPTER VI

ATTRACTION

THE next morning was clear and blue, with a touch of frostin the air, and Katherine took Zu-Zu, Gertrude's dainty little Japanese spaniel, for a stroll in the Park, revelling in the wintry sunshine.

She had a well-fitting coat and skirt of dark blue cloth and large black hat which showed off the bronzen lights in her glossy hair, while two snowy white fox pelts thrown round her neck made the best possible setting for her really beautiful complexion. She looked like some dainty Romney, strolling along after the tiny dog which skipped and played with its gleaming steel chain.

Presently she turned towards the statue, and just by the corner a pleasant sensation of surprise struck her, as she saw Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke's tall person swinging towards her.

"Good morning, Joan of Arc!" he cried as he neared. "Where's the white banner and long lance, eh?"

"I've left them at home for safety," she joked back. "The sword of my tongue is my only weapon to-day."

He walked slowly along by her, and it somehow struck neither of them as odd that he should join her walk *sans ceremonie*.

"Seriously, Miss Iden, I'm jolly glad to meet you," he said earnestly. "It's not often I get a chance of talking to a sensible girl like you. Most of those I've come across haven't two ideas in their shallow heads. I do get so tired of their rotten chatter about clothes and shows. I want to know a whole lot of things you can tell me if you're kind enough. I was so struck with the way you faced that ridiculous mob yesterday for your ideals. It took a brave woman to stand up to that man as you did."

"Well, if I have any ideals at all, I must live up to them," said Kate. "I didn't care a bit for the man, I felt so angry and fierce when he got in my way. I had to get into that meeting or die—so I hit out at him. Only, what I hated was the feeling that next minute I'd be overpowered hopelessly, and if I am going to fight, I like a chance of winning anyhow."

"Mrs Iden did quite well too—and you're lucky in having her to sympathise with your doings. Now my people think I can't do right whatever I do. I'm the family scapegoat. Even when I saved a gun in one of our little scraps in

China as a middy, all my father said was : 'He must have been a fool to stick in such a hot corner.' "

"Some people never are satisfied," she replied. "I should have thought they'd have been delighted!" This phrase sounded so stupidly banal that she flushed with anger; it was absurd to feel nervously excited for no reason thus.

"It's my belief they were rather sorry I turned up alive after it. You see I'm the eldest, but their favourite is Humphrey, my brother; and the girls (four of them—all with yellow hair and antique names) hate me because I tell them the truth at times. Father wants Humphrey to have the property, because he's a nice money-saving, tame pussy; and the mater wants me to marry a rich wife, and of course I jib at every one she trots out for me to look at. It's insane, considering I'm not twenty-four! I don't want a woman for her fortune, or to have her take me for mine." He said this with the slightest plaintiveness, which, hackneyed as the sentiment was, made it sound real to his eager listener.

She was responding quicker than she knew to his sly demands for sympathy, and these intimate little confidences did not surprise her, as most men made them to her when she kept quiet and asked them questions at judicious intervals. Besides which, she flattered herself the least bit

that she had the knack of eliciting people's secrets.

"Still, I envy you your family," she answered. "I'm a lonely only-girl, and my own parents are both dead; as I told you yesterday, Gertie's my step-mother. Fortunately, she's the opposite of the usual story-book horror, but yet I do miss brothers and sisters, as to get them on the hire-system of friendships is so unsatisfactory."

"I expect the men all spoil things by proposing, and the girls are all cats out of jealousy," said Ulf bluntly.

"What a good guess!" she laughed back. "That shows you *are* twenty-four. I should have put you about twenty otherwise."

A seat appeared temptingly in the warming sun.

"Let's pretend it's June," said he, and she sat down by him.

As she made Zu-Zu jump over his outheld foot, he said:

"It's awfully funny how one does know things about people with whom one has a sympathy. I've only seen you this little time, but I feel as if we'd been pals for ages. Don't you? Own up, now!"

She looked down at the grass before answering, but he laughed and leaned forward so as to face her completely.

"Yes," she said simply, and felt inclined to laugh also; though why, she had no idea.

"Isn't it jolly when you find someone again, as I did you?" he went on. "It was sheer good luck I went to Albert Hall yesterday. You know Banquor's quite a good pal, but not nearly as quick at ideas as a girl. He liked you too—in fact, nearly as much as a new goblin, I think."

He was taking in her every detail, and marking with approval the harmony of all her clothes and ornaments, and her minor good points, such as her perfect little ears, spotless teeth, and the way the soft hair grew downily behind in her neck.

"I'd like to be pals with you too," he said softly, but still with that curiously boyish (and reassuring) note in his voice which she had noted yesterday when he had seized upon her. "It can't be reckoned as cheek when two people have that feeling of old friendship, can it? I often wonder if it's true about past lives and having known each other ages ago in some old hole like Egypt or Rome? . . . Well, nobody knows for sure—but the feeling's there and solid enough, isn't it?"

She looked him over and smiled.

"Yes. . . . I can quite see you as a young Saxon thane in a blue tunic, swinging a big battle-axe at Hastings."

He grinned widely.

"I do envy you people with imagination—it's so jolly to just hit the right thing. Wish we could use battle-axes now—the last rotten sword

Thacks made me broke right off when I tested it on a sheep in my ship's cold store."

He stretched out his arm and turned his wrist powerfully, and she saw that it was no idle boast; the strength in the great muscles was enormous, for all his air of tall spareness. He had a trick, too, of half closing his eyes and clasping his hands that somehow gave the impression of a lazy tiger drawing up and relaxing its great paws for very joy in its strength.

She lectured herself quickly for a silly child, and told herself that he was only an ordinary modern youth, and that she was showing him a far too flattering attention. And then something else within her refused to believe this—an absurd, unreasonable something which she could not analyse at all. And, of course, next minute she did it again by the interested inquiry:

"I, in my turn, envy you who have had the adventures without merely imagining them. Tell me about China—what did you do?"

"Well, I wasn't in time for Port Arthur—it was mostly over by we got there; but I did have a few thrills with some ghouls who were digging up graves and looting the dead—shot one, but, as he managed to run off, never knew if he dropped after. But the weirdest sight I ever saw was up the river, when we caught some Chinese pirates and handed them over to the local mandarin to deal with under Chinese law.

They all had to be executed, and I had to take a file of our men to see it done. There was a sort of waste land used for a potter's field, because the earth was very red there, and we went to it. It was the worst thing I ever saw, bar none. They stood the pirates up in an untidy row, and the executioner in a devilish mask went along them with a big sword. He sliced off head after head till the ground was simply soaking, and then—this was what turned me over—the little kiddies out of the crowd came running up and actually played football with some of the heads! Ugh! Little wretches! The pirates were awfully quiet before their turns though—nobody yelled for mercy—I fancy they'd all had enough opium to keep them steady. I know I got on board sharp, and had three pegs of whisky straight off. Is that a wild enough yarn for you?"

"It must have been horrid," said Kate, with a slight shiver. "But it was an experience, and it was dramatic. I would cheerfully take the risk of seeing things like that even to be a man and free, to be able to go wherever I liked, and to be strong enough to stand the racket of it all. Now, as a girl, I'm tied down by my weaker frame and the stupid social tie of a chaperone on any excursion worth going—as my old German professor once said, "Der ghost is willing, but der meat is weak."

"Cheer up! If you were a man you'd have the nuisance of being accepted by the first girl you proposed to, I'm sure," said Ulf, with a frivolous grin. "Then you'd have to get rid of her afterwards."

Kate glanced at her watch and sprang up with mock indignation.

"Sir, I should be so fascinating a man that she'd never release me for any cause! But to return to sense—it's nearly one, and I must be in for lunch."

"Well, I'm coming along as far as Mount Street, any way," he retorted amicably, and they chattered merrily till they reached her door.

"May I come in on Sunday afternoon and bring you a funny little jade charm I got in Pekin?" he asked, suddenly turning back after he had said good morning.

"Not next Sunday. I'm sorry, but we're going to Bournemouth for the week-end, as Gertie has some friends down there."

"Well, then, I'll take my chance of finding you in next week. Au revoir." And he was gone.

As the door shut she felt a sudden sense of chill and an undefinable restlessness. She went in to lunch and found Gertrude very busy reviewing her morning's purchases and forgettings, and just as the cutlets were being taken away the telephone rang.

Kate got up, and with a pleasant little surprise heard Ulf's voice ask :

"That you, Miss Iden ? Yes ? You can't beat me now, through the 'phone, for having the cheek to ask you ; but Banquor's just rung me up to say he's going to see his aunt, who lives near Bournemouth, on Saturday—he has to do kow-tow once in a while—and he's taking me in his car, and if you and Mrs Iden will honour us by risking your lives with us, we'll be delighted. It's a Daimler with a big wind-screen and Cape hood, and so you won't get soaked if it rains. Do come ! "

"Wait a moment."

She dropped the instrument and turned to Gertrude.

"I met young Hume-Bolingbroke in the park, and we'd quite a long talk. Now, Lord Banquor has asked him to get us to go to Bournemouth in their car. Do you think we might go ? " she asked, trying to seem quite indifferent.

To her surprise Gertrude said briskly :

"Yes, it's all right ; say we'll go."

Kate did so, and after a minute's chatter rang off, and then Gertrude explained her prompt acceptance.

"I met Carrie Clifford in Bond Street, and she comes from the Hume-Bolingbrokes' part of the country, and I asked her what she knew

of them. It seems they think no end of themselves, even though they've no title nearer than the mother's uncle, the first Lord Jourdain, and behave pretty much as if they'd had a private ark during the flood. They've a nice old place and a lot of land, but no ready money, and have to economise most of the year to keep up their small town house at all. For mere country squires, pride to the extent they have it seems rather silly. Carrie says the old General, our friend's father, talks as if he'd won Waterloo all by himself, and his wife gets her maid to make most of her dresses, and only buys two per season from expensive shops. Carrie didn't know much about the boys, except one was at sea and the others at Harrow; but the girls are like the mother, quite conventional. Still, as he seems an amusing youth, we may as well know him; and I rather liked young Banquor, who seemed as if he'd improve on acquaintance —and *his* people are solid enough, both in cash and caste. It's rather a refreshing way of discovering new friends—meeting them as we did. Besides, if they're going to be near Bournemouth, they'll probably drop in and enliven Sunday, for the Hollands are dear, delightful souls, but their friends are mostly retired ancients."

"It will do us good to get out of town again," replied Kate absently; and then, in a keener

tone: "I think I'll take the white crêpe de Chine. It's prettier than the blue ninon."

Gertrude laughed gleefully.

"My dear Kitty, it's so nice to hear you talk of clothes sometimes nowadays. When I heard you talking to Mrs Somerset last week about constitutional power, I began to fear you'd got beyond me. I was jealous—I always *am* a bit—of your clever brain; but when you're human—oh, I do love you, Kate!"

But Kate was looking out from the window, and did not heed her.

"What luck, Gertie! Here's Uncle Jim! What can have brought him to town just now? He never said he was coming, in his letter."

With a bound she was in the hall and opened the door.

Uncle Jim Siward was not really Kate's uncle, but a cousin of her father's: a spruce, well-set-up, clean-shaven man of sixty, but whose alert air, and piercing grey eyes under straight white brows, seemed to proclaim him ten years younger. He had been in the Navy; but when he was about forty, his only brother, John, was smitten with consumption, so that Jim felt it his duty to leave the service he adored and spend his time with him.

He was one who never looked back if his duty lay forward, and so he stayed with John till the end, trying to help him too by interesting him-

self in John's great iron-foundry in their native Yorkshire, which the stricken man had loved, even as he himself had loved the sea.

Yet Jim's sacrifice had its reward in a most unusual and dramatic way.

About a year after John's death, Jim went to look round a farm which had belonged to their family for four generations, and which, although it was a high barren moorland for the most part, John would never sell, having an innate Yorkshire love of "a bit o' land"; and the old bedridden grandam of the tenant asked if "t' mester" would honour her by a visit.

Jim went up, and then, after half an hour's retailment of her aches, she told him that in her girlhood his grandfather had sought for coal upon the farm, and the report said it had been found, but as he died directly afterwards it had never been worked, and apparently the agent and lawyers then in charge had never bothered about it. Now that she herself had not long to live, she felt it did not matter if "t' farm were spoiled," and so she called it to his notice.

Uncle Jim wrote for the needful engineers; and the end was, that a splendid mine produced him as much as the foundry had hitherto done, so that, with the two, he was indeed a wealthy man.

Thirty years ago he had lost the woman he loved, during their engagement, with typhoid

fever, and had never replaced her; but in his later years, as Kate grew up, he came to consider her as a daughter, and was amusingly jealous of her affection for Gertrude.

"How do, Gertrude?" he said, as he entered, with Kate hanging on his arm like a child of ten. "I didn't intend coming up for another month, but I had something so interesting to tell Kitty that I couldn't wait. When we were on the moor top last summer she saw a mound that she bet me was a prehistoric tomb, and I told her that I'd set some diggers on, in the slack time now. I did, and they found it was—and see here, lass—what was found round the man's neck."

Bubbling with excitement like a boy, he pulled out a small parcel from his coat pocket, and there rolled upon the table a beautiful gold torque and three heavy twisted bangles, all perfect as when the chief, in whose grave they had lain, was lowered into it by his men.

"Oh, uncle, how lovely! How?—why? Were they really there?" chorused Kate and Gertrude eagerly.

"They were on a great big skeleton of a man, who must have stood six feet four if he was an inch," replied Uncle Jim, laughing. "It was most awfully lucky, but, although several men had been digging, it was just on noon, and all had knocked off work but old Matthew, and I was watching him——"

"You mean you were grubbing too—I know you!" struck in Kate.

"Perhaps I *did* have a spade," continued Uncle Jim, "but directly I spied the shine of these through the mould and broken fragments of stone slabs over the bones, I just said, 'Mum's the word, Matt; we can't have any meddling Crown agents claiming treasure trove—we've only found a few bones'; and Matt grinned. And when we'd poked and made sure there was no more, we shouted for the others to come and clear the earth properly; and then I wrote to Professor Dryden in York, and he came on Sunday and has offered £100 for the skeleton—but I waited, because if he offered *that* it must be worth more; so I packed it in a box, and got a fellow I knew, who was motoring to town, to bring it on the roof, so as to save the rail charging me corpse fares, which they'd have done if they'd found out. Unreasonable folk they are—once charged me for a dog when it was only a ten-inch monkey in my pocket. I've left the bones at the British Museum to see what the proper price should be, and then you can have the money, Kitty, as it's your idea that I 'should dig.'"

Kate protested faintly but smiling. Uncle Jim took up the torque, and, bending it open gently, slipped it round her neck, and pushed her to the mirror.

"I cleaned it all myself, and washed it in ammonia too," he said, and as she looked into his kindly old eyes, Kate kissed him and hugged him as she had done when he had brought her new dolls.

He picked up the telephone book in its handsome red slipover.

"You'll do a play with me to-night?" he asked. "What shall it be?"

"I want to see the frocks in the new show at the Gaiety—unless Kate wants to see something serious," said Gertrude.

"No—let's go to the Gaiety, if we can get seats," said Kate. "It may be difficult at so short notice——"

But the Bond Street agency replied that they had three seats in the dress circle which had just been returned, so he secured them and then went into Kate's own room, where they spent the afternoon very happily, for he took great interest in the curios she had collected.

Like most sailors, he had brought back many artistic things from his travels. Even since his retirement he had made various interesting expeditions in odd parts of the world, and a goodly half of his spoils had found their way into Kate's den.

He inquired genially after her adventures in the League's service, and as she saw his tolerant grin, she slapped his hand playfully.

"You don't take me seriously," she cried. "It's not a game—it's a serious solid business—politics! I'm a politician, uncle."

"My dear lassie, I was not laughing—really. Only, you'll just be a politician till the Right Man comes along—and then you'll conclude it's not worth the bother. Still, there's no telling, and if you still stick to it, I shall only say it proves my rooted idea—that Kate's no ordinary woman."

"I don't believe in that wonderful Man, uncle! I think he's like Santa Claus—only for the very young to believe—and often heard of, but never seen."

Yet she suddenly went bright pink, and Uncle Jim's surprised stare set her hunting for a pamphlet to hide her face.

"Um—m! When you do come across that man I want to look him well over, my Kitty-cat. There's a lot of scamps going about nowadays, and a man's eye knows a man better than a woman's. Set a thief—you see?"

"Cheer up, uncle! I'm a bachelor girl—not a white muslin Miss Nancy. Look! I want you to read over this article for *The Leaguers' Lantern*, as it deals with 'Equal wages for both sexes where there is equal ability.' I want a few illustrations from your foundry folk."

And they plunged eagerly into the subject, and stayed buried in it till he had to depart to his club to change for dinner.

They were in good time at the Gaiety, as the opening dance was among the best things of the piece, and Uncle Jim was old-fashioned enough to like his money's worth—even in plays. In the middle of the first act, a movement in the stalls attracted Kate's glance, and there, pushing along a crowded row, she saw Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke.

With him was a girl, very slim, very tall, gowned in a pale green creation, cut much too low for theatre wear, and a flat diamond fillet flashing in her ultra-modishly done hair, which was of a rare shade of Titian red. Behind her came a quiet, grey-haired, black-robed woman, obviously a paid chaperone.

Quick dislike to the girl rose in Kate's mind. She was too deeply set in her habit of indifference to men's doings to at first know the feeling for jealousy, and, if she had, would have been angry with herself for indulgence in such a silly emotion.

It was a thing she had never felt since, when in Rangoon, Ian had danced once too often with a pretty Irish girl, and even then it had been nothing like the sharp pang she had now.

In the first interval Gertrude spied the trio, and pointed them out to Uncle Jim, telling him how they met Ulf.

"I wonder who the girl is?" she ended. "She's rather striking."

"Oddly enough, I've seen her before," replied

uncle, fixing his eye-glass. "She was up at the Carlisle Pageant with Lady Norweyan. She's a Lady Llora Colmes-Inch—old Welsh Earl's daughter—only child, motherless, and, by all accounts, a real handful. I've noticed that women with those flamy-red lips often are. See the way she leans over, talking to the boy —she can't be more than twenty-one or two, and she's the assurance of forty-five."

He looked with satisfaction at Kate's dainty head and white throat rising from the soft blue ninon folds, and her profile was like a delicate miniature.

As if drawn by some thought-wave, Ulf turned and looked up, and then (Lady Llora's gaze being fixed on the programme), after his polite nod to Gertrude, he smiled a long smile straight at Kate.

She found that her little shoe was tapping a glad accompaniment to the next gay air, and that she was longing for Saturday to come.

CHAPTER VII

FASCINATION

About eleven on Saturday, a big grey car panted at Gertrude's door, its brass fixtures gleaming golden in the pale sun ; a slight frost had melted early, leaving the sky a faint azure.

Katherine, wrapped from throat to heels in a long dark-blue fur-lined coat, came out and greeted both youths gaily, and then cautioned the page to stand her dressing-bag straight-way up under the seat.

"You look like Gilda in *The Girls of Blankenberg* in that fetching blue velvet bonnet," said Ulf, pulling off a fur glove to clasp her hand. "You're one of the few people who can really wear one. Lord! What sights some of my aunts look when they *will* frame their faces in them! Girls should not attempt one unless they look as if they could remember being rocked in a cradle!"

"I never thought I looked so babyish!" laughed Kate. "I feel awfully grown up."

"Oh, are you? Not much! I've heard you sound aged one hundred, but also aged three, Miss Katherine Iden!" he chaffed, as he turned to assure Gertrude that her luggage was secure on the rack behind.

Banquor got into the driver's seat, and Kate saw that the chauffeur was mounting a neat motor-cycle.

"It's my own invention," explained Banquor. "Then, if I tire of driving, he's alongside, but still out of ear-shot. My mater always said servants make half the trouble in this world."

Gertrude remembered a particularly spicy episode of some years back in which the Duchess had figured indiscreetly, and smiled in the depths of her pretty heliotrope satin bonnet.

"Silence is golden," smiled Ulf significantly, but really meaning nothing. He had a trick of applying emphasis needlessly, but it took new acquaintances some time to find him out.

"I've often thought that a stupid saying when referring to ordinary use," said Gertrude. "Just think how appalling a dinner would be if everyone had the maxim properly in mind! It would be like landing at a railway station rather late, with only a sovereign—no chance of getting any change."

"Still, speech is silver-change, isn't it, Mrs Iden? so the proverb does apply," said the young Scot briskly.

And with that they were off on the southern road, the sunbeams dancing on metal and glass, and the very spirit of gladness skipping in Kate's heart as the crisp rushing air tinted her cheeks like pink wind-flowers. The glorious morning light affected her like a draught of clear cold water from some magic spring. She revelled in the powerful car's smooth swiftness, which reminded her of that Greek wisdom which perched Hermes, Spirit of Speed, on a rolling, winged wheel. She and Gertrude hired yearly an electric brougham for town use, as they had suffered from a series of exasperating chauffeurs, so had given up entire ownership; so now the faster car was a pleasant change. Banquor drove with the skill of much practice at Brooklands—the craft which can dart arrow-like between traffic and yet bring no sense of danger to anyone upon the road. When they were clear of London, he drove a steady forty-five without it being at all apparent, and talked amusingly to Gertrude the while.

Behind, Ulf and Kate spoke little, but she kept flushing absurdly because he so constantly scanned her face as the car fled along the wide white roads between dewy fields and woods, whose wealth of coppery leaves were fast dropping to cold earth.

Kate's spirits continued to rise, as Ulf softly joked and teased her.

For the past year her work with the League had shown her life from its more serious side, until it had tinged her with a sobriety far beyond her years; but now this tall boy's sunny smile was thawing her into the gaiety of very sixteen, even as the sun was melting the road's ice-shot pools.

Suddenly, *à propos* of nothing, he said:

"I don't like your first name. It doesn't fit you; Katherine should be a very stately, serious woman, with possibly a strong arm, too, like the Shrew; and nothing could be more unlike her than you! Have you noticed, too, that all the historical Katherines are unfortunate?"

"So they are—yes; Katherine of France—she was Henry V.'s widow very early—Katherines of Aragon and Braganza, luckless gooseberries to all their husbands' little affairs—Katherine de Medici, unhappy at heart."

"People should be allowed to re-name themselves when they grow up. But one can twist Katherine into so many pretty shapes. Kate I like, but it's too cool for you—Kathy too Irish. Ah! I've got it exactly, so dainty and Russian—Kitzi! Fits you better than your sweet bonnet."

"It sounds rather pussy-pussy, though," answered she, yet conscious that she liked it.

"I get on exceedingly well with Persian pussies—they never scratch me," he smiled. "But it's curious how names do describe people.

Now, my sister Cordelia you can see at once—with her yellow ropes of early British hair, and her faint-away-in-King-Lear's-arms air! You'd hate her on sight."

"Then I'll never meet her. By the way, where is she just now? And your mother?"

He fidgeted oddly as he replied:

"Cordelia's staying with Aunt Marigold in Ireland, and the mater's paying duty visits to some of our family inflictions in the Midlands."

They were rushing down a steep hill with a turn at the bottom, and Banquor, skilful as he was, only just managed to swerve aside and miss the foremost sheep of a little flock coming from a concealed gate. The second of suspense set both women gasping, and the car's sharp twist jerked Kate against Ulf's shoulder.

"Poor Kitzi! Steady—it's all right!" he said, and held her hand for the next two miles. Then she drew it away, settled her bonnet and felt silly.

"I'd have jumped clear with you somehow even if we'd tipped over," he said. "You're quite safe so long as I'm near—Kitzi—in her own basket," he continued absurdly.

"You're perfectly ridiculous," she replied, trying to look severe and failing. "My last basket was a wee round one, and I collected two pounds ten in it at a League meeting—quite good for one short row of seats."

"If the feminine world were composed of girls like you, there'd have been no need for the League. Men would have caved in, and passed all the bills they wanted long ago. Tell me—isn't your idea of man a tyrant?"

"Well—yes—even though he gloves the mailed fist in velvet," she said frankly. "Every man I've ever met expected to rule me in some way. One of my literary girl-friends makes notes of some of my experiences and says she wants to make short stories from them as warnings to other female bachelors!"

"If I were your—ah—father, Miss Kitzi, you'd see the exception. I could refuse you nothing—in reason or out! I believe in giving girls their whole way. If not—they may do yours for a time, but they hate you at the bottom. It's all very fine saying the strong man wins—he does—once, but the woman doesn't like it repeating. If I'd kept you from that meeting the other day, you'd have hated me. Confess, now!"

She laughed and played with her glove-strap, and her down-turned bonnet hid his look from her.

"Yes! I should! But let's talk of more exciting things. Tell me some more of your Eastern adventures. I've been to Burma, you know, and can grasp the charm of the open seas so much better than anyone who hasn't."

He plunged into a thrilling tale of chasing Chinese pirate junks, and presently they pulled

up at a quaint little roadside inn for a cup of hot tea and a sandwich.

"So much jollier than a formal lunch," said Gertrude, as Banquor helped her down. She had drawn him out to talk much more than usual; indeed he had even asked her to come in the car to Wimborne on the Sunday morning to question an antiquarian there as to a certain goblin legend, and she had accepted.

As the car shot away again afterwards, Kate found herself comparing Ulf's views of tyranny with Ian's—much to the latter's detriment.

Here at least was a sensible modern man, who realised that the strong hand didn't succeed with woman.

She smiled at him very kindly, and then a sudden unpleasant memory struck her.

"Who was that pretty girl I saw with you at the Gaiety the other night? Her hair was magnificent."

"Oh, Llorrie Colmes-Inch. She's quite an old pal of mine. Her family misunderstand her too, and we sympathise together. Is she pretty? I don't care about her colouring much. If I could have left her, I should have come up to talk to you then."

He noted with satisfaction her eager eyes, as she asked her apparently careless question.

"I get on with you much better; you aren't spiteful about everything alive, as she is," he said

with the daring directness which was one of his strongest weapons. "Say, are you going to be busy all the time with the Hollands, or can you come for a spin with us one day? I expect Banquor'll stay till Wednesday.'

"I'll see. I don't, of course, know what the Hollands' fixtures are till we arrive."

The breeze was chillier now they were nearing the coast, and she rubbed her hands briskly together.

"Take them off and let me warm them—don't be silly. It's all right," he said, and, pulling off her glove, gently rubbed her little cold fingers. He was aware of the magic that lies in close touch, and used it thus—so naturally that she did not resist, nor draw them away for a long space, and then it was to give him the other hand too.

Then, with a start of displeasure, she saw the pine-woods which marked Bournemouth's outskirts, and realised that Gertrude was leaning over her seat-back, asking her if she could remember the shortest cut to the Hollands' house near the cliffs.

And in a few minutes they glided up to its gate, and Mrs Holland's prettily-dressed, grey-shot head peeped over the wattle fencing with merry welcome. But as Banquor was anxious to get to his aunt's early, the two young men declined her hospitable invitation to come in, disembarked their passengers, and drove away.

Yet, Ulf's backward look at the house was so long, that his friend raised an inquiring sandy eyebrow as he steered down the steep road.

"Awfully fetching, isn't she?" Ulf answered promptly.

"You be careful. She doesn't look as if she'd relish being one of your usuals. Let her alone unless you're in earnest," said the Marquis frankly.

"Oh, I say! You turning good. Well!" ejaculated Ulf indignantly. "I've never seen anything like her before. I'm more 'gone' than ever I have been! She's so refreshingly green, somehow. She's as devie with her frocks as any Gaiety spin, and yet she's as straight as a Quaker. It's a ripping combine. Her eyes are quite perfect too."

He lit a cigarette rapturously. A certain close line which sometimes set round Banquor's lips came now.

"At all events you *could* be serious in her case. I gather from Mrs Iden that she's very well off—nice income of her own. My advice is, to reflect . . . or get a wire, and leave early to-morrow."

"Oh—um—m—er—why, so much the better if she *has* got the shekels."

"I wish you'd not say shekels, it reminds me of that nasty Shylockstein I called on with you yesterday," said Banquor irritably. "If you aren't more careful with him, he'll be telling your

dear papa. You're a regular old Turk or Chinee with your girls, Ulf. First it was little Jessie the vicar's daughter down home, then Llora Colmes-Inch, and now this one! All so close together, too! And a whole list last time you had leave as well! Fient!" (Banquor was quite antique Scots sometimes). "Ye should have a harem openly!"

"Well, what can a fellow do when they chase him so? They soon forget—and so do I! As for the Colmes-Inch, I like her because her frocks and stories are so salty. Quite Maxim's—only safe—and they say she's a demon of a temper. If I tied myself to her, I'd have to be constantly getting foreign stations. You're no saint yourself—why suddenly lecture me?"

"Why, just because I like the girl a bit—and you can't say she 'chases you,'—if you do, I flatly contradict you!" and a fighting gleam crept into Banquor's eye; "and because I pay my—ah—harem—openly in good money. You pay yours—your respectable fancies—in nothing but kisses and blarney! I met little Jessie one day on the Downs when you'd gone to Ireland, and I couldn't stick her white face and empty eyes. 'Twasn't cricket!"

"Look here!" said Ulf hotly. "I'll get angry in a minute. Jessie was a dowdy little ass, and I care for Kitzi Iden more than for any woman I've ever met, and I'm going to see it through, I

believe. If you don't like my way of doing it, why, get another pal, my lord Banquor! You'll not find another who'll stick to you as I've done!"

"All right—I only wanted to warn you in time," said his lordship amiably as they waited for the lodgekeeper to open the gates of his aunt's comfortable Georgian manor-house.

"Think you'll succeed, though? She may refuse you quite calmly."

"I've never seen one yet that didn't rise if I fished long enough," replied Ulf serenely, with the magnificent aplomb of the invincible. "Wonder what my people'd say to her? They're keen on long pedigrees like our own, and the mater wants my wife to have a title. She'll probably jib at Kitzi for that reason only."

"I'm sure the Idens are all right—women don't have ears and finger-tips like hers without a good long ancestry, as a rule. I used to study physiology at Oxford, and learned to notice those points," replied Banquor. "Now come along in, and help me butter my worthy aunt. She's got a rare lot of old silver, and my mother doesn't like to try openly for it herself, but we've agreed to divide if the old girl leaves it to me for being a good boy!"

And they went up the wide steps with the air of two good little scholars home for the holidays.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPITULATION

Colonel Holland, late of the Indian Army, and his wife were, as Gertrude said, delightful people. Theirs was a most romantic marriage, for it had been violently opposed by her parents, who selfishly desired to retain their sweet-natured daughter at home, but she had bravely run off with her gallant young subaltern, and now, after thirty-five years, they were lovers still.

Kate liked to watch their pleasant little devices for each other's help or amusement; it was so delicious to see at least one ideal marriage, after all the other disillusioning matches in her ken.

She was so strangely absent-minded during the after-dinner bridge, that Gertrude quite wondered what was amiss.

When she got upstairs she sat by the bright fire, and her floating thoughts were brilliant as its glow; she conjured up Ulf's face, and even stroked her hand where his had touched it, and did not find the action foolish. Decidedly,

Kate was advancing on the flowery way of sentiment.

Then she felt annoyed as she remembered that she would have to stay behind with Mrs Holland, out of politeness, if Banquor took Gertrude to Wimborne in the car.

Praying that it might rain, she got into bed, and dreamed she was being pursued by Banquor and Ulf on an aeroplane laden with hosts of small goblins.

To her satisfaction, it did pour with rain, and yet as the day wore on she felt passively bored; but about three, as they sat in the pleasant room the Colonel called "our house-place," a combination of lounge and library, the maid announced "Mr Hume-Bolingbroke," and Ulf's wide smile beamed like the sun through a stormy day.

When he had been introduced to the Colonel, he held up to Kate's astonished gaze a favourite bracelet of hers, which she had not missed last night.

"I found it in the car, and thought I'd better bring it quickly lest you were worrying about it," he said.

But he did not add the truth—that he had slyly slipped it from her wrist when he took off her glove, with the express idea of bringing it back to-day. Hanging upon it, however, was the quaintest little god of exquisite

green-white jade. "Please take him for luck," said Ulf. "I got him as a bit of loot in China —forbidden, of course."

"I'm sure there's an exciting tale attached to him—do tell us," replied Kate eagerly.

But he lifted his shoulders nervously, as if his coat were tight—a trick he had.

"Er—it's a long story—it's not quite a Sunday one—I'll tell you it some other day," he said, grinning absurdly, to carry off his embarrassment.

There were excellent reasons, indeed, for his refusal! The face of the luckless Manchu girl, to whom, for a month, he had been more than her god, was not a pleasant ghost to raise.

Amid Kate's laughing protests and thanks, a famous pianist, his wife, and a nondescript niece were shown in, and the subject dropped, as the talk turned upon music; and, the musician once mounted on his hobby (and the piano-stool), time slipped pleasantly away, until nearly seven —when, of course, Mrs Holland invited Ulf to stay to dinner.

The next day was fine, but Kate's hopes that they might all six squeeze into the car and go to Wimborne were dashed by Mrs Holland saying that she must go and call upon a sick friend staying at the Royal Bath Hotel, so that she could only offer herself politely as her escort.

Thus about eleven, Gertrude, Colonel Holland, and the two young men set off in the car, and

Kate and her hostess departed to the hotel, where, as the friend was too ill to see anyone but Mrs Holland, she waited in the lounge and looked discontentedly at a paper.

She had been waiting about twenty minutes when to her astonishment the swing doors opened and Ulf came in.

"I suddenly remembered that I'd left some very private papers loose in my dressing-table drawer at Lady Herald's, so the others set me down, and I got a taxi back there and locked them up, and then, as I luckily knew where you were, I came along. Shall we go into the garden until Mrs Holland comes back?"

It struck Kate that he had been incredibly quick to get out to the Manor and back to the Bath, but she said nothing, and, leaving word with a page-boy that they were in the garden or just upon the cliff, they strolled out into the crisp salt air, and, passing through the crimson gate, looked down upon the gleaming sea breaking upon the buff sand.

"I'm jolly glad I thought of those papers," said Ulf softly. "Isn't the sea ripping this morning? Don't you wish we were going yachting right round the Isle? Some day we'll borrow Banquor's uncle's yacht, the *Dream-Wings*, and go somewhere."

She watched him closely as he stood on the cliff-top looking seawards, alert and keen-eyed

as some young Viking longing for the open wave.

A little further along the cliff was a house with a long garden, and close against the house, beyond it, a terrace brilliant with magnificent chrysanthemums, and they walked along and hung over the fence in admiration.

"They make me think of Japan and the sunny East," said Kate, lazily withdrawing her arm from the woodwork, to walk onwards.

"I'd love to dress you in a kimona like the one I saw a princess wear at the Mikado's garden-party," he answered. "Hello! What's up?"

In looking at the flowers they had walked round the corner of the garden into a road leading landwards from the cliff, and now down it they heard a loud clatter of tins upon wood, hoofs pounding, and men's voices wildly shouting, mixed with a child's screams.

In another instant they saw that two powerful horses, their reins trailing and broken, were tearing headlong towards the unfenced cliff, dragging a light gipsy caravan, the low door of which was fast bolted, imprisoning within a woman with her arm in a sling and a child whose head peeped just above it. Evidently the man driving had got down, and the horses taken fright and bolted, thus leaving the woman quite unable to get out in time, as the cliff was close at hand.

In a flash Ulf had turned, and Kate, realising what he was about to do, panted out: "You can't—they'll drag you over."

But with a sailor's quickness he did the one wise thing—flung himself at the nearest horse's head and dragged it sharply round to the left, and, though even his great strength could not check it at once, it crashed on a few yards, and smashed safely into a tangle of wattle-fencing and garden-bed; and the next thing Kate's dazed eyes took in was the whole van tipping slowly over, and a flying mixture of broken glass, wood splinters, and bits of furze-bush rising from it!

Feeling her powers of movement and clear thought leave her for a moment, she watched Ulf's grey coat leap out of the mass of struggling horses, and flop down again upon a frantic head —heard his voice shout to the woman to lie down flat in the van, and felt her own feet mechanically begin to carry her towards him.

The road seemed to get full suddenly of the running gipsy-men, passers-by, and a policeman, who had apparently sprung from the furze-bushes beyond the garden, and just as Kate scrambled through the broken fence the dishevelled woman was lifted out of the van window, quite unhurt; and as she watched, Ulf and the policeman cut the traces and freed the horses, which staggered up and looked stupidly about them.

The gipsy husband was showering excited thanks and blessings upon Ulf, and the crowd applauded, all of which he staved off with a laughing gesture of silence.

"That's all right," he said to the husband. "Your wife can tell me my fortune free of charge next time I come past your camp! So sorry you've had this smash. But I don't think the horses are much the worse, except for that cut on the bay's flank."

He brushed out of the group and confronted Kate, whose white face and startled eyes told their own tale.

"I say—come and sit down a minute—steady—hold up! It's all right now. I thought the smash had better be on land, than over the cliff, you see."

He caught her arm and led her into one of Bournemouth's legion of little thatched-roofed wind-shelters on the cliff, which turned a discreet back to the public, close at hand.

Then as she sank upon one of its rustic seats, he made no more ado, but put his arm about her.

"Why did you feel afraid?" he asked, although he knew the answer.

"Oh—because——" she faltered.

"Kitzi darling——! Darling! It's true—oh!"

He kissed her on the mouth and cheeks and

eyes, and she, in a spellbound silence, leaned her head against his shoulder as he drew her close.

"Don't think me very mad, darling, for speaking so soon—but I've loved you ever since I saw you in that riot," he said.

"Oh, I'm mad too—I must be to do—this—after knowing you about ten days—I must be dreaming——" she said wildly.

"Ten days! My dear, we've known each other for centuries in other lives, I'm certain. Thank goodness we've had the sense to know it, and not wait for silly years before we told each other. Now—— Oh, bother these people! —bother them——"

A nurse and some children streamed into their refuge.

"Never mind, dear—we'll have *always*—to be together in—soon," he went on, as Kate sprang up and set her hat straight.

"Oh, what about Mrs Holland? She'll think we're lost!" she cried, as they set off towards the hotel.

"Oh, she'll be in the garden all right—she can't have heard the noise of the upset," said he cheerily. "I'll say you turned faint after it—you did, you know—in a way!"

They beheld Mrs Holland's elegant vieux-rose toque above the green of the fence, and hastened to the seat where she was reading, and as she

started up to meet them Ulf cut her questions short with a smiling :

"No, we hadn't fallen over the cliff, Mrs Holland—hope we've not kept you long—but you've missed a fine bit of Drury-Lane sensational play. There was a van going to hurl itself over the cliff's deadly ravine, and a bold sailorman rushed forward and choked off the horse's breath with his little finger!"

"He was very brave!" said Kate. "He saved the woman's life, and turned the van aside into the hedge just in time—and it upset, and we stayed fishing the woman out of it afterwards. It was awfully thrilling—I nearly fainted to see them all mixed up in the garden yonder."

"My dear child! Where? Oh, I *must* see it! Just my luck! I always arrive just as the fire's put out, or the man is pulled from the river!"

"There isn't much to see now—we got the horses on their feet, and I fancy they've gone away. But we can walk past there," said Ulf. And they set out, all talking at once, towards the capsized van.

Kate walked not the sandy cliff but the rainbow road to paradise.

The impossible had happened—she had found the wonderful Right Man, at last, she believed, and now he strode beside her looking like a very

Einheiriar from Valhalla! She had never believed such joy as she felt then to be humanly possible. She dare hardly look at him lest Mrs Holland should guess their exquisite secret too soon.

Ulf had for her a spell, an intoxicating charm, which held her like a magic web of delight.

It was to her inexplicable, yet she did not want it explained—only to revel in it. With other men she had measured everything in the calm balance of reason, but now she did not want to think. It was the kind of love she had always thought folly, the blind devotion that a slave-girl may have for some splendid young king.

But Mrs Holland had sharp eyes. She was one of those benevolent women who, happy themselves, long to make others so, and she had actually made no fewer than nine matches.

"And only one separation among them all, since!" she told her husband.

This nice breezy boy appealed to her instinct for romance, and so, as he was leaving them, after they had inspected the now-under-repair van, she casually asked him, if he had nothing better to do, to come in to tea that afternoon.

That day seemed twelve hours from dreamland to Kate; lunch, Gertrude's gay tale of Banquor's successful goblin-hunt with the ancient sage at Wimborne, she heard and saw dimly through a rosy mist.

Luckily for her, several other people dropped in to tea, so it was easy for she and Ulf to slip into the small conservatory and murmur happily to each other.

"I'm afraid Gertie will think I'm quite crazy to care for you, dear, after so short a time—I think we'd better not tell her till we get back to town."

"I quite agree, love—she'd stand the shock better—oh, Kitzi, you are the sweetest pet I've ever even imagined."

'What about your people, dear?" she asked. "I hope they'll like me."

"Well, I don't propose to tell them at all—yet. If I bring you up, quite a stranger, and say, 'This is my wife-to-be, Mater,' she'll hate you straight—out of sheer cussedness, because you weren't her own choice for me. But if you get to know her as my pal first, you'll conquer her, and the rest is easy. You know, Kitzi darling, I've got awful cheek to ask you, for I've no money except my pay and a few hundreds from my godmother, and we'll have to scrape till the poor old gov'nor goes to glory. But you have something, haven't you? We could manage?"

Kate laughed happily. Manage! She would have loved sewing his very uniform buttons on just then. A flat with him would be heaven.

"Of course," she answered merrily. "I can raise enough to pull along somehow. I can

manage very cleverly although I do look frivolous sometimes. And Gertie's a dear—she'll help."

"What made me mention money at all, Kitzi dear, was only that I'd just hate to see you short of anything. Fancy you going to courts and shows in frocks that my sisters would think shabby! I couldn't let you have that humiliation. If some of my aunts peg out, their jointures will fall in, and then the gov'nor will be nice, perhaps."

"Oh, really, I can fix any amount of clothes," said Kate, smiling at his boyish notion of the great expense of raiment. "What do you think I dress like now?"

"Well; but I know my sisters always seem hard up whatever they get allowed. But it doesn't matter, dear; we can manage, I'm sure, and have a flat in town to begin with, and then you can come out to me in winter. I'll try to get a nice station, and, of course, some time I must come into the poor old man's shoes. He's got seven old wounds and a whole lot of fevers in his constitution. Then we shall have the old place, and the land may pay better if times mend. . . . You'll look so lovely trailing about on the terrace—it's Elizabethan; we'll walk in the moonlight together."

He rambled on eagerly, and she listened, enthralled by his plans and his delightful voice, which was perhaps his greatest charm. She

noted, with joy too, how he seemed to ignore the fact that she was well off, and that he only took his own means into consideration when asking her to share his immediate future, insinuating that afterwards he must entirely support her—so different from some of the other suitors' designs.

Suddenly he frowned slightly, and touched his pocket as if he remembered something, though he took no paper out.

"Look here, darling, I've a letter from my father to say he wants me to run down home to see him to-morrow, and I'll have to go, as Banquor's also due in town for a dance at his sister's. It's very boresome, as I'd meant going back with you in the car again."

"Well, Gertie's staying here till Thursday," answered Kate with regret.

"And here's an idea, my pet—Lady Herald's giving a dance at the Grafton on Monday—but you don't know her yet, do you?"

"No—but Carrie Clifford's very chummy with her—she could bring me——" said Kate cheerfully. "It will be lovely—our first dance—— Listen—there's somebody going; we must go back to the other room."

He kissed her lingeringly, and they rejoined the party by the fireside, hoping in the bustle of departures that their absence had passed unremarked.

CHAPTER IX

GLAMOUR

"One, two, three—and let go! One, two, three—and oh!" shrilled Ian's delirious voice. His cot's mosquito-netting waved wildly as he tossed and turned, insanely picturing himself at the tree-felling in the forest. Five terrible days of pain had racked him since they had carried him up from the river to the bungalow, and now at hot intervals of anguish he raved of Kate, letters, and Rangoon, mixed up with anxieties of trees which tried to fall upon him, or elephants which went musth and bolted with him through endless jungle.

Fortunately for him, the very afternoon of his mishap Than Dine had the wit to steal his pony and rush down to Panshwe, where, in response to the lad's frantic signallings, the mail steamer from Bhamo had checked its downward course, and he had begged the captain to send word for a doctor from Kanhla to come up with all speed. On board, however, was a worthy Irish surgeon,

on a holiday, and he very considerately left the ship and returned to Mingaing with Than Dine, where he promptly re-dressed Ian's wounds and undoubtedly saved his life.

Ma See and Ma Twai were, by turns, watching him. Than Dine was doing his best to keep the bungalow's daily routine smoothly running, and cool the invalid's drinks. Yet, despite their united efforts, the worst wound showed signs of poisoning, and Ma Twai moaned miserably to Donalbain as she sat on the veranda in the cooler draught.

"He will die, thakin! I have done all I can, and yet it heals not! Why could not the doctor thakin stay, instead of going away down to Mandalay again? Journeys are follies when people's lives hang in the scales."

"He had to catch his steamer to England in Rangoon next week—it was very good of him to even wait the two days he did, and change to the slow cargo-boat down to Kanhla. Courage, Ma Twai! Wounds heal all right when once they do begin to dry," replied the Scot.

But, bravely as he spoke, he sighed as he thought of the seven ghastly places from thigh to ankle where the teeth and claws had mauled so deep.

"If we could only have taken him to Mandalay Hospital——" he went on, but the girl cut him short indignantly.

"Hospital! No! I think not! Why, they cut off people's legs and arms there! A maimed man is best dead! My thakin without his leg! Never! If he lives, he lives whole."

Donalbain smiled at her possessive pronoun, but had no heart to contest it now. Their lonely life had linked Ian's welfare closer to his affections than any mere blood-brother of civilisation.

"Well, the doctor said he would try to send up another surgeon, if there was one among the tourist-steamer's passengers on the upward voyage. But I think to-night will test Ian thakin's endurance one way or the other. If he could sleep the fever might drop, but I daren't give him any more injections with that big wound in its present state."

Ma See's wrinkled face peered out of the bedroom "chick's" edge.

"He is sleeping at last! He has not muttered for ten minutes!" she said gladly. "If I were you, thakin, I would take away Ma Twai to talk in the road. The least sound is clear in here."

They both sighed with relief, and went quietly down the steps towards the village, where the Kachin tracker and the beaters were curing the skin of the tigress, and saying proudly, as they stretched it, that it was the best they had ever nailed out. They had saved the two little cubs alive, which now clawed playfully at each other in a strong bamboo cage.

"I want to make offering at the Pagoda," said Ma Twai, and as they strolled in its direction, Donalbain's keen ear caught the sound of a tired pony's hoofs. Next moment he recognised the dark cream pony, by its peculiar white-tipped black tail, as the property of Falconer, one of the neighbouring Teak Association's assistants, whose forest hut was about fifteen miles away in the deeper forests.

His lugale, or table-boy, tumbled off it, shikoed wearily, and held out a note wrapped in a palm-leaf.

"Misfortunes never come singly," said Donalbain to Ma Twai. "Here's Falconer half crazy with fever—thinks he's in for blood-poisoning from a thorn-prick, and wants me to go and write to his mother for him! He's alone and very bad, so I suppose I must go, as his seems a worse case than M'Rosse's; for he has got you and the others here to look after him. I couldn't do any more than you if I stayed now, and I can get back the day after to-morrow. I'd better take some men along, and then, if Falconer thinks he *is* going to cock his toes, we can carry him back here with us, as it's better than the jungle."

They turned back and walked quickly to the bungalow, but even as they went, Than Dine and a runner from Panshwe came trotting to meet them. Donalbain tore open the telegram the latter handed him, and laughed for relief.

"Doctor Johnson coming up by rail Kanhla and next boat on—Rourke," ran the Hibernian's wire from Mandalay.

The Scot's joy was great, for now, in two days at latest, the doctor would arrive, and if Ian only slept that night the danger would be almost over.

While Than Dine crept noiselessly about, packing his little jungle bag (he banished Kan Ka, Donalbain's own lad, as a clattering hyena), Donalbain said to Ma Twai :

"Before I go I want you to promise me one thing, Ma Twai. Assure me solemnly that you won't let Ian thakin have any letters or papers if the dak-runner brings the mail while I'm away. He'll be asking for them if he comes conscious and well enough to see print. Now it is the custom of our people, when they are about to give in marriage, to write it in these papers with pictures, for the world to know. If Miss Iden is to quickly marry some other thakin, and it were so written, it would kill Ian to know it just now. You understand ? "

"Yes, I will not give him any papers, and the letters will be locked in the mail-box."

"You must hide the papers directly they come, Ma Twai, because, if you were out and Than Dine watching him, he (being the child of a well-meaning buffalo) might think to please his master and give him the papers. If they are hidden he runs no risk."

To his surprise, the girl replied with the most solemn oath possible—to a Burmese the last vow of all.

"I swear! May the successive Buddhas, numerous as the river sands, be unable to deliver me from the miseries of future existence if I give him any paper till you return."

He went out to his waiting pony, but found, to his disgust, that the men were whispering excitedly of the magnificent funeral they would give M'Rosse thakin! It seemed ominous, and he swore angrily, bidding them be silent, as he mounted and galloped away down the forest track.

But Ian's youth and wiry frame stood him in good stead, and when Dr Johnson arrived, he attended to the wounds and did what Ma Twai's simple skill could not do; so that, on the second day of his visit the danger was practically over, although the patient was still feverish and exhausted with suffering. On the third day the doctor departed for Bhamo, promising to return in another few days, when, if Ian continued to make progress steadily, there would be no need to remove him to Kanhla Hospital as he at first proposed.

On the evening of the day he left, Ian lay staring into the mosquito-net tent over his cot, feeling limp as a rag, and trying, with his now clearer mind, to evade his desperate memories

of Katherine, like a man dodging a pursuer in a wood.

Donalbain had not returned, and Ma Twai in the outer room was crouching over her little mirror, rubbing thanaka paste into her cheeks.

The dim native lamp she had lighted in preference to the powerful hurricane lantern in Ian's room, threw quaint shadows on walls and rafters, and he watched two little house-lizards crawling busily upon them, listening to their cheerful "tucktoo-tucktoo's!" with an odd envy.

Lucky little mates! they were together and happy, and he was alone and half crazed with pain. His loneliness had never been as bad now that he had no future to plan for. Before that fatal letter he had often thought thoughts like this: "We will go to Australia some time for a trip. We'll hire a car when we're at home for the summer." Now there was no "we"—only one solitary Ian, who didn't care whether his indifferent eyes looked at streets or forests.

Maybe he was a fool, for Kate was not the only girl alive; next time he left Burma—— But then —she was Kate! There was nobody like her—no! Could any other woman ever be to him what she was?—have her strange mixed charms of clever woman, fascinating playmate, and loving child? —have her lovely face, her poetic thoughts, her practical strength of mind, all combined in one

distracting whole ? No, he was no fool to have been taken in by her. He found a certain dim consolation as he grasped this.

He had not grasped till now, either, how entirely he had lived and wrought for her; and the habits of years do not drop in mere days, talk as psychologists may of the effects of sudden shocks. Every tree he had "girdled," every log he had seen dragged, had seemed a step towards her, and the very river the high-road home to her! Now! He groaned as he watched the shadows drift above his head.

Suddenly he remembered it was mail-day. Perhaps, as Donalbain foretold, there was some further word, some tiny hope—impossible—but——

"Ma Twai! Is the dak come?" he called hoarsely.

She rose, her lips set tight ere replying.

"No, thakin! There were only two printed envelopes from M'Bain's. I knew them by the little anchor pictures in the corners—and sent them on to Donalbain thakin by Ma Gan, who was going home that way."

"I must invent something," she thought. The Burmese mind has this trait: if it cannot tell the truth, it always prefers a decorative lie, rather than an unornamental, plain one.

"I wish you could read English, Ma Twai—I'm so tired of hearing the tucktoos," he said,

trying to make some conversational screen for his disappointment.

"Shall I tell the thakin stories to pass the time? Or my mother knows many——"

"No, don't call her. I can't keep my ideas on one thing long, yet. By the way, Ma Twai, how long have you lived here? I've never asked you before, somehow."

Her eyes narrowed to a line as she answered:

"When I was a little child we lived some time in Mandalay in my aunt's house, and in Bhamo when I was older—and we have been here since the thakins came to Mingaing."

"It seems such years since then—I feel it like twenty sometimes. I envy you people who've never left Burma, though—you don't know what it means to miss Europe——"

She cut in on his vague words with a deliberate phrase:

"Since the thakin has been ill the time to me is long—as life."

He started slightly at the warmth in her tone.

"Hope I've not given you too much trouble, Ma Twai. You've both been too good to me by half. I shall find you a beautiful daleezan (necklace) as soon as I can get into Bhamo, for these days."

"Daleezan! You know that I want no daleezan for serving my thakin. I am not a

bazaar girl! To be here, to keep you from harm, is all my desire."

"Egad! Well, I'm very glad to hear it—it's not many women, either brown or white, who do things for nothing! Why, even my white thakinma would have been pleased with a ring or bangle after ten days' hard nursing like this."

Her eyes glittered quick scorn.

"Ah, but—that thakinma, Mees Id—enne, was hard—forgive me for so saying. She was a wife like a master."

"Like a master? What a word—what do you mean?" asked he, more curious than stung.

"It is in the laws of Manu. The poonjees tell of them. I learned it all from a nun (methilayen) in the sacred tongue. Shall I repeat the words? Yes?" said Ma Twai proudly.

"A wife like a master haughtily addresses her husband in pride and hard words, 'Hey, you ugly fellow! Do this—do that!' and will not allow him to say a word, though she herself speaks far more than she ought to. She gives him only the worst clothes, reserving the best for herself; she sleeps on the softest bed; she never considers his feelings, but thinks only of her own, while she makes him run for her sandals and fan, and always eats before he does. Is not that true, thakin?"

"Good Lord! Wherever did you guess that Ma Twai? It's an exact picture of the modern

English wife! Even the best of them expects most of those things as her right."

"It is written in her face, in the picture," said Ma Twai, nodding towards the outer room and the photo. "You might have had to divorce her later, for we can always get rid of the three evil wives."

"Three evil wives? Then what on earth are your good ones like?" asked Ian, smiling despite himself.

"There are three bad kinds of wives, thakin," pursued Ma Twai gravely. "Those like masters, those like enemies, those like thieves. There are also the four good kinds, those like mothers, those like sisters, those like friends, and those like slaves, and they should never be put away, but lived with for life."

"It's a very good definition of the ideal wife—if one could combine the four in one woman, Ma Twai. Did you ever come across such a beauty?"

"No, thakin. It is sufficient to be like one or two, to be loved by one's husband. We all try to be thus, but more of us like the slave, for it is written that she is first of the seven, and should she pray to be a man in her next existence, she shall not be disappointed, and shall attain Nek'ban (Nirvana) before any of the others. A wife like a slave does thus: she lays out his clothes ready for her husband, she kneels humbly

and gives him tea to drink and considers what is best for him to eat. If he finds fault in the house, she does not answer back insolently, nor does she eat or drink till he has done. Her whole life is her lord's, and her hands and feet his servants. Her eyes turn to him as a flower seeks the sun. She holds his pains dearer than her pleasures, and will die to save him from hurt. Should he attain Peace before her, and leave her children in his image, she must serve them even as himself."

Ma Twai's voice sank into the soft dusk of the room, and she came a little nearer the bed. Ian's hand was hanging down outside the mosquito net. Very gently she raised it and tucked it under the folds.

"The wife, like a mother's first care, in the law-book is written, that she tends her husband like her child, and sees that no bad bugs nor beetles sting him by night—— Lie still, thakin, you must not do so!"

He suddenly raised the curtains and leaned out to see her face in the shadows, catching her hand as she was drawing it away.

Her great dark eyes took on the softness of the jungle leopardess's when she turns to her mate, and her lips parted but no sound came.

Ian was weaker than he knew, and the mere effort of trying to move set his forehead gleaming with moisture.

"You would be a wife like a slave, Ma Twai—I know it—you——"

He tried to draw her head towards him, and she sank it close to his shoulder on the sheet, trembling with joy from comb to sandals.

His pale lips sought her cheek and found it, but she did not kiss back—no Burmese woman (unless taught) ever kisses as Europeans do—but she drew her breath shortly in the curious little "love sniff" which is its equivalent, and clung to his hand, her pulses beating in her slim wrists.

"You are my life and my love, thakin—I am the happy dust under your feet. It was for this I shikoed at the Pagoda," she murmured. "I never feared the tigress when I saw you beneath her——"

"Ma Twai, you were the bravest girl I ever saw! My little love, you struck at her like a man! The whole village honours you—and I—I owe you my life twice——"

"The younger men of the village say I did well to kill her," replied Ma Twai dreamily, "but the older ones like Oo Bwin say I have lost merit by taking life—even of the tigress. But for you I would have risked the worst Nag'ye (Buddhist Hades) and never cared a plantain leaf."

A long ray of the rising moon shot through the reed slats of the window chick. Silently as a mouse she rose and rolled it back so that the ruddy light (it was on the wane now, for the pwe

had been held four days ere the full) cast vague gleams on the matted floor, and touched Ian's white face, making his hair darker on the white pillow. The whole air was full of strange mystic shadows and subtle sounds of the night. The fireflies drifted in through the open space, and presently Ma Twai caught one and held it in her palm, laughing low, like a happy child, as the tiny lamp lit her hand.

His fingers stroked her glossy hair as she knelt by him, and the spell of the dusk was sweet and heavy upon them both. Neither spoke for a little space.

Then said Ma Twai, low and happily : " I am your slave-wife, Shin ! " (Lord).

But before he could answer her, there came a sudden break to the dreams.

Footsteps, firm and boot-shod, tramped on the veranda, steps without and a stick rapped on the outer door, followed by the creaking of cart-wheels.

Ma Twai sprang to her feet with an angry cry, and swept aside the purdah between the bedroom and veranda.

CHAPTER X

WARNING

A TALL, gaunt figure, dressed in the khaki drill-coat and skirt of the travelling English-woman, fronted her, and the glow of two strong cart-lamps threw her weather-worn features into clear view.

Ma Twai gasped with relief as she saw that the newcomer's age was uncertain, and her hair, which was parted austerely under a shabby topi, quite grey.

"Our thakin is sick," she began in Burmese, and then tried to air her English. "Very bad man my——"

But the lady laughed and replied in fair Burmese: "It is well, little sister—I am used to nursing all sicknesses." And then added in English: "Is it Mr M'Rosse? May I come in? I am Mary Iron, a medical missionary, and on my way to Bhamo; but as I had to wait in Panshwe and they told me you were ill I came on, as I've two days to wait for the steamer."

Ian struggled with politeness an amazed moment, and answered like a man barely awake. "Yes—come right in, Miss—Iron—and sit down. Please bring a light, Ma Twai. Do tell your coolies to bring in your bag, and make yourself at home. My partner's away, unluckily, but my lugale will do his best to make you comfortable."

"Well, this is really a pleasant surprise," said Miss Iron's soft voice, which somehow did not match her prim exterior. "They told me in the village that you were at death's front garden gate, if not at his door! So I came on even before the cart did—by some yards. Really, Mr M'Rosse, you don't look as ill as you should, after such a terrible affair."

She was drawing off her washleather gloves and removing her hat already, with that frank camaraderie that much travel in strange places gives to all sensible women, and she smiled pleasantly at Than Dine, who came, teapot in hand, to ask if she would like some tea, before brewing it.

Ma See, who had been just on the point of relieving guard with her daughter as she arrived, now came shuffling in and shikoed, then calmly squatted at the bed-foot and put a bit of betel into her mouth before she spoke. She was not going to resign her post as nurse for anybody. Ma Twai took the hint and came in with a cup of

tea almost directly, but before she appeared Miss Iron's brows were raised slightly.

"You seem very well nursed, Mr M'Rosse?" she said interrogatively.

"I could not have better care," replied Ian. "This is Ma See, a neighbour of ours, and Ma Twai Glay, her daughter, saved my life from the tigress. Perhaps you did not hear that part of the story? I was down under the brute and at the last gasp, and she dropped like forked lightning on top of it and stuck her dah into its throat just in time."

Ma Twai, a flickering frown on her face, knelt by Ian, supporting the tea-cup in her hand, so that he should not have a fraction of trouble in taking it. To have her lovely moonlight heaven broken in upon by this old she-buffalo of a white woman! She was furious, and found it hard to hide it.

He too was deeply troubled. Miss Iron's advent seemed the counter-spell to the glowing orient dream of the past hour. She brought back the very essence of sober, workaday, go-to-church-and-have-lunch-afterwards England with a rush, and he instinctively rebelled against it. Then he remembered that it was very good of her to come so far out of her way to bother after a strange young man, and felt himself ungrateful.

"Really, you are awfully kind to come over,"

he said, after a pause of half a minute, during which Than Dine brought in the rest of the tea-things.

"Not at all." And then to Ma Twai: "You are a brave girl, and should be much honoured for your deed," said Miss Mary cheerfully. "It requires much courage to even shoot a tiger, how much more to attack one with a knife."

Ma Twai's frown relaxed, and she answered her quite amiably.

"The thakin is much beloved in our village, but the men were all fools. Someone had to strike, so I struck. But we all thought that he would die afterwards. My mother knew much weza (magic), and the doctor who came was skilful too."

She was not going to have this newcomer usurping her nurseship if she could help it, and threw in her mother's skill as a spoke in the wheel.

Ian's natural courtesy was gaining the uppermost part again now, and he laughed, almost merrily, for the first time since his illness.

"What a jolly little tea-party this is, now! Who would have thought three days ago that I should have a real Englishwoman to tea again! I felt much more like being the *pièce de résistance* at the splendid funeral I heard Than Dine telling Ma See I should have! Now, Miss Iron, do make

yourself at home, and have another biscuit and some more tea. Where have you been before you came up country ? Was there any news on the river ? "

She told him of her journey up from below Mandalay, where she had been asked to attend a Shan lady of high rank, and of her adventures in her house ; and as she talked on in her level tones, he noted the contrast between her face and Ma See's. Each was so typical of its nation, and the difference so wide. In Mary Iron's eyes lay a deep peace, and in her lined forehead a calm strength, entirely opposed to the Burmese woman's crafty orbs and wrinkled cunning.

" I certainly think I shall win my Shan lady eventually," went on Miss Mary. " She had a dear little daughter, and she promised me to send her to Mr Clarion's Bible classes in Mandalay soon. I like the Burmese so much better than the Hindus—they ask so few idiotic questions, and have such a grasp of things. Once, when I was near Lucknow, I was dreadfully embarrassed with a nice little Begum, who wanted to know why I wasn't married. I knew she thought badly of me because I wasn't, and when she asked, I was inspired to reply, ' Because I could never find a man of exactly my own caste ! ' It saved the situation and my credit. She looked upon me as one to be pitied afterwards, instead of despising me."

Ian laughed, but something in the sound caught her experienced ear, and she rose, gathering her hat and gloves together.

"You ought to go to sleep now, and not dream about tigers," she said. "Your boy has helped mine to unpack my bedding in Mr Donalbain's room, I see, and I'm sure I shall sleep well after my long day's travelling. So good-night, and rest quietly."

She smiled her nice elder-sisterly smile and walked into the sitting-room, escorted by Ma See with the lantern, and across to where the servants had laid out her mattress on the Scotchman's cot; but presently she missed the magazine she had carried in her hand when she arrived, and turned to get it from the sitting-room table, which was directly opposite Ian's couch in his room. With her going, the spell of darkness fell over it again, and Ma Twai felt possessed of her idol once more. With a shy, happy giggle, she bent over him, and, screwing up her red lips into a ridiculous, but to her delicious, imitation of his kiss, she touched his cheek, and slipped from the room, dropping the purdah with a defiant flounce behind her, as she came face to face with Miss Mary, who had come for her magazine.

There was a quick duel of the eyes between the two women, but neither spoke, and Ma Twai turned away first and went down the veranda steps homewards. Mary Iron, her smile faded

to sadness, fell to her evening prayers in the silence of the night.

The next afternoon Ian was so much better, that Miss Mary ventured to prop him up with three pillows, while she sat talking to him of the outer world. They were rather expecting Donalbain to return that day, since no message had been sent to the contrary since three days ago, when a tree-feller brought a chit saying that Falconer was really unfit to be left, but that, if Ian needed his partner, he would risk it and return. To which, of course, Ma Twai replied that Ian thakin was on the mend, and they could very well manage for a week, if needs were.

Mary Iron was to leave for Panshwe very early next morning, and as she sat there watching Ian, her mind was sorely troubled. She had read the signs last night, but how far things were, she did not know. She was one of those rare women who are specially fitted to be missionaries, inasmuch as she disliked meddling with what was not her real concern. Still, where interference was necessary, she did it tactfully.

She had prayed about her discovery, and now sought for an opening of the dangerous topic. With a young man like Ian it was wary walking, if she were to do any good. In her wide experience she had come across men of his impulsive temperament often enough to realise both his strengths and weaknesses. Then suddenly a way

occurred to her, as she searched her memory of the past few days.

"When I was in Mandalay last week, something dreadful happened," she said, "though perhaps I oughtn't to regale an invalid with tragedies."

"Oh, fire away! I don't get the morning papers, remember," replied he, lazily interested. "It's a perfect godsend to hear your news, you know."

"Well, you know Mr Mastermate who kept the big stores?"

"I've heard of him—vaguely, of course—what?"

"Then perhaps you don't know that years ago he married a Burmese woman, just after the taking of the city in '84? He took her home once, and she was utterly impossible. She got fearfully jealous of even the hotel chambermaids who served them in Europe, and so he brought her back again and they've always lived out here, except once or twice he's been home on holidays alone. They had two or three children, and the eldest boy became a regular terror. He went utterly native in some things, but he just had white blood enough to realise his position as a 'chi-chi.' His father got so tired of him because he would go with a bad set of Chinese gamblers in the worst parts of Mandalay, that he refused to give him any more money to loaf with. By the way, his father had sent him to the mission

school at first, but he ran away every time. Then suddenly he seemed to grasp that he was half white, and hadn't had a chance in life—that's how he put it in court. Well, he came home one day and demanded to be sent to Europe 'like a gentleman,' and threatened his father with all sorts of violence if he didn't supply the money for this. His mother took her boy's part and made a terrible scene too. Now, as you know, Mr Mastermate was only about forty-eight and a very good-looking man, full of spirits still. He suddenly felt he must shake off this awful encumbrance of a virago and cub, and he told her that he would divorce her (for using angry, rebellious words, you can do so under the Burmese law, and they were only married by that) and that he wouldn't give the boy another penny. He'd chosen to live native, and native he must live now.

"Well, the lad had a cheap, Belgian-made revolver in his pocket, and he fired straight at his father, and two shots went through his lungs—one after the other, as neatly as on a rifle-range! Mr Mastermate died in about ten minutes, and they took the boy and his mother to prison, though she's out on bail since. Isn't it awful?"

The silence was painful as she ceased speaking. Ian did not speak. His thoughts were too busy.

"It's enough to prove the fact that it's best to keep to one's own race," ventured Mary very gently.

"Still, that's an exaggerated case, perhaps. Look at all the English murders of the same kind," replied he quite calmly. "There are many cases where the Burmese wife is more faithful and a better mate to her husband than the white woman of the same class."

Mary's lips set tightly, and she feared the worst. Was he too far under the spell to be released?

"Still, don't you think that mental equality is very desirable in all marriage, and you can't pretend that the average Burmese girl is the equal of the young white man who comes out here, can you? and you know also that marriage is, or should be, a permanent institution. That was poor Mr Mastermate's trouble. Twenty years ago his wife was a pretty, dainty toy, a pleasure in every sense, but now, with her beauty gone, her mind not one jot advanced from a child's petty ideas, and her tongue like a lash, he was tired of her. She could not keep pace with her mate as a white woman does. The white man clings to his own kind in the end. And then——"

"And then the deserted Burmese simply marries a Burman and thinks no wrong of it," finished Ian rather tartly.

"I don't mean to be a tiresome meddler," said Mary boldly, "but you feel like a boy to me, and I am, after all, a servant of what I believe to be the good principle in this world. I can't help

speaking out. You needn't answer if you don't want to hear my warning. Tell me, are——"

"No! I'm not living with Ma Twai Glay, if that's what you mean, Miss Iron. I care for her because she's been very good to me and stuck by me when a white woman has forsaken me, and she has no mercenary motive in loving me."

He flung this out with defiance rampant.

Mary sighed with relief.

"My dear boy, you have been forsaken by one woman—but there are plenty of sweet ones left in England! But there's no need to overdo your gratitude to Ma Twai and tie yourself to her thus. Think of her in even ten years—she'll be getting like Ma See!"

"Look here, Miss Iron, I don't think you quite understand," he rejoined uneasily. "You don't look at things from my point of view—you can't. You don't know how lonely I am, nor how intolerable our lives are here. Besides, most men simply divorce their Burmese wives when they want freedom and to go home again—the girls know this when they come to them——"

"Now see here, in your turn, my boy," replied Mary, her pleasant grey eyes flashing alertly. "I'm getting on in life, and, as a missionary, I've seen a great deal. It's my business to preach, although I hate narrow-minded, priggish people. It's perfectly natural that you should want a

young mate and helpmeet, but for heaven's sake take one of your own sort! I'm no upholder of monks who isolate themselves from women as an evil. I'm a simple medical missionary of the Church of England. But if you give way to all the temptations which come into your life out here so easily, there's no point in your Christianity at all! To live straight and marry honestly is the aim of all good men through all ages, and it's neither more nor less than the voice of the devil that urges you differently. It's all right if you take the girl and mean to stick to her till death—she's your wife, however unsuitable socially—and you don't desert her. I don't care if it is good Burmese law that you can easily divorce her and that it's held no shame. You look upon her all the time as your mistress, even if she, poor child, holds you as her lawful husband, and the sin is upon your head. You are at least a Christian and responsible to your own soul. It's the unwritten law which counts in things spiritual, mostly—not the policeman round the corner. Go home on leave and bring back a nice English girl. Never mind if you do find it a bit hard to make ends meet. You're good-looking enough to hold any girl's love, you know—am I not an old flatterer? But it's no use mincing matters. If you'd seen the hopeless fate of all the little Eurasian children that I have, you'd consider before you took the risk of any. . . .

Now, you must judge for yourself. I've told you what I felt impelled to."

"But she saved my life—few white women would have done even that," said he appealingly. "Surely that shows she cares for me?"

"Certainly it does," replied Mary. "But don't do anything in a hurry. How would it be if you paid her fees to come down to a good school in Rangoon, and see how she takes to civilised life first? She could always come back to her mother if she proved unsuitable. I can speak to her about this if you like?—that is, after you have weighed it over."

She took up a needle and cotton and began darning a tear in her drill riding coat, the sunlight through the open door turning the iron of her hair, and also her soft grey cotton dress, to polished steel. Her gentle quiet smile was back again now her duty was done.

"Ma Twai hasn't been here at all to-day. I wonder——" said Ian suddenly. "Ma See came for about half an hour before noon, while you were out looking round the village, but she wasn't communicative. Hello! That's a pony—perhaps it's Donalbain——"

Mary rose and went out on the veranda, but came back promptly, a note in her hand.

"It's from the Babu (native clerk) on the quay at Panshwe. He says the steamer is coming up by to-night instead of morning, so

I'll have to start away now almost. It seems they've got some contrivance for poling off sand-banks, and when they got stuck below Kanhla yesterday they tried it, and it worked splendidly, so they'll be along hours earlier. . . . Well, now, I'll just be putting my things together. Shall I send for Ma Twai ? " She paused anxiously, but he met her eyes honestly.

" Yes—please do," he said briefly.

She despatched Than Dine at once, but he did not come back, and the bullock-cart was waiting at the door before he appeared, rubbing his ear ruefully.

" Ma Twai has a bad temper, thakinma," he declared to Mary. " She hit me hard for nothing at all. I only said you had been in her place with the thakin all this morning, and she up and caught me thus ! She did not say that she would come."

In another hour the sun would drop, and Mary could delay no longer. She went into Ian's room and took his hand in hers.

" She was angry already about me even being here with you," she said. " I'm afraid she won't see me, so I leave her to you, dear boy. Send her to me at the Mission in Rangoon next month, if she will come. I will write to you from Bhamo, to cheer you up ; and so get well, and good-bye."

She got up on to the creaky-wheeled bullock-

cart, and it moved away into the jungle, and along the track to Panshwe. The sweet scents and glorious lights of the sunset's beginning wrapped Mary Iron in a warm mantle of rejoicing in the earth's beauties. She loved the colours, the wonders of Burma, and this very love had taught her to understand much of the weird fascination of the land, and also of its daughters' strange charm.

The cart was about half a mile out of Mingaing when a hasty rustle was heard in the bushes on one side. Quickly as a little wild cat, Ma Twai sprang out of the jungle and flung up her arms sheer in front of the bullocks, which shied and stopped abruptly. Her face was flushed, her eyes sparkling with suppressed emotions.

"I am glad you are going, white woman with the wooden figure!" she broke out rudely. "You spoke evil words of me to my thakin. He looked differently at me just now, when I went to him, so I come to ask why——"

Mary looked very grave, and then tried to speak easily.

"I asked him if he thought you would like to come to Rangoon with me, Ma Twai. He has told me he loves you, but there is much you must learn first. You could learn the white man's ways if you came there."

Scornful malice curved the girl's lips, and she jerked her arm out in the certain Burmese

gesture of derision, snapping her thumb and finger.

"Yes! And meanwhile he would forget me! You have never known a man, or you would know better than to tell me that! I do not wish to learn the white woman's ways—he hates them—they are fatherless she-dogs. Has he not suffered enough with a white girl? I will kill anyone who tries to part us now. Take my advice, and do not return! May the Journey Nat take you far hence!"

She turned, and vanished in the wood as swiftly as she had come, and returned to the bungalow by the short-cut she had taken to catch the cart up.

Mary sighed, and then smiled, as the bullock-boy tugged the little animals' tails to go forward, and arranged her well-worn suit-case more firmly on top of her brown kit-bag.

"I think he will persuade her to it all right, with a little time," she mused. "I will write from Bhamo, and keep him up to the mark."

But the letter never reached him, for the dak-runner who bore it was drowned in a flooded creek.

CHAPTER XI

DECISION

Mary Iron was gone, but her warning lingered behind to some purpose, and in the bungalow there was anything but peace.

Ian's returning strength helped his wavering spirit no little, and Ma Twai's smouldering passion had only been fanned by the missionary's well-meant interference. She knew that Mary's words had raised a barrier between them, and she was determined to break it down, but, with the innate tact of the Burmese woman, she was in no way hasty or careless in so doing.

Her one outburst of rage, when she had confronted her enemy, had relieved her feelings, and now she could plan carefully. She tended Ian's wants just as discreetly and quietly as before that one night when their lips had met, and kept herself calmly aloof from any more demonstrations.

Besides, it was easy for her to absent herself now, as in three days more Donalbain came

home, accompanied by a very fragile Falconer in a litter, and the two convalescents made intimate interviews impossible, as they sat on the veranda together.

The day before they returned there came in two or three newspapers and some letters in the dak-box, and the former Ma Twai, faithful to her promise, sent on, to Donalbain, without saying a word to Than Dine, who was not there when the dak-runner came in.

Then, the second evening that Ian was well enough to sit in his long chair, overlooking the track to the jungle, she strolled down the village street, smartly arrayed, and got into conversation with Moung Sehn Nee, a spruce young fellow who lived a short distance away, and whose parents were quite well off, and had given many gifts to the Pagoda. Then, still chatting to him, she sauntered back past the bungalow, so that Ian saw her, and so towards Ma See's house, where she somewhat curtly told Moung Sehn Nee that she was very busy finishing some silk weft; and so he went off rather crestfallen.

It was a trifling incident, but it served her turn. Ian, although he knew for a certainty that Ma Twai was his if he said the word, and was, of course, above petty jealousy of a mere Burman, at the very sight of her merrily talking to another man felt a strange uneasy pang rise inwardly.

Ma See came in the next morning and casually remarked that she had had a letter from her sister in Mandalay (which she had taken to the poonjee-kyoung to have read for her), asking them to go down to stay with her, and that she thought they should do so in about ten days' time.

Ian answered that it would be a pleasant change for Ma Twai, but the same pin-pricking of his firmer resolution to overcome his longing stung him again. He cursed the fate that bound him, lame and helpless, to the bungalow, human-like speedily ungrateful for the fact that he was still alive at all after so terrible an adventure.

In another week he was limping with the help of a strong stick, and one day, about three in the afternoon, he managed to get along, out by the Sonhla bank, and revelled in the mere ability to use his feet again, even if his vagrant thoughts tormented him still.

Ah! if only Kate had been there, now, in the green glades of the riverside, to chatter and tell him stories, or give him a restful arm! Then he banished her image sternly, and with set lips walked slowly on through the trees.

There was golden sand silted up here on the bank, and it was slow going even for a sound pair of feet; so presently he found a raised mound and sat down carefully upon it, watching the muddy wavelets rush by. Just beyond him the

river took a sharp bend, and the bank was high, screening from his sight a little island which lay in the middle of the water. On the near side to Ian's bank the shore opposite this islet was flat and the stream shallow in ordinary times, and rather wider than the further current between the far side, which was a much deeper channel, bridged by several rocks just conveniently far apart for stepping-stones. The islet itself was a pretty little oval patch of rocks and grass, standing well out of the water when the river was low, but which in a flood might be covered deeply.

But while Ian lay there he gave a slight start when he saw that the water was rising, as creeks will in Burma at this time of the year. As he idly watched on, it rose higher, until he moved a yard or two farther away, for these sudden rushes of swirling brown flood are strong enough to sweep a man off if they catch him unawares.

It was bringing down some loose wreckage from higher up-jungle even now—a bamboo hen-coop, a bit of fencing.

He was just wondering whose hut lay nearest the bank over there, when a faint scream struck his woodman's ear from the direction of the island.

He grasped his stick and started up the high bend as quickly as he could, but as he came to the top he hurried still more.

Down on the island, now perilously small among the rushing waves, were two figures, doll-like, tiny, but waving their scarves and screaming for very terror to four or five Mingaing men and boys assembled on the near shore —attracted by the urgent shouts of a small boy in charge of some buffaloes, who had first noted the distressed pair.

Ian got down among them—and recognised Ma See and Ma Twai!

A bundle of loose sticks at their feet told why they were on such a strange spot as the islet. They had evidently been wood-gathering in the far-side jungle, had crossed on the stepping-rocks, and intended swimming the shallower ford, since the spot was secluded and every Upper Burmese woman swims like a duck. But now, with the sudden rise of the flood, the mere weight of the current would carry them downstream, and dash them upon a dangerously sharp spur of rocks when the channel narrowed. There seemed no escape from their danger, and the water was rising every racing minute. . . .

Ian could have cursed aloud as he knew himself powerless to dive in and tow a rope across to them, which they could easily have tied to a jutting rock, and pulled themselves safely across. He hobbled up to the group of gesticulating, excited Burmans, and ordered one youth very quickly:

"Run for a rope, and bring back Donalbain thakin if he is there; if not, bring Tha Kwe—a strong swimmer, anyhow!"

Then, as the lithe brown lad dashed away among the trees, he shouted to the imperilled couple to have no fear.

Ma See was wringing her hands, as a little rush of foamy water washed her feet, but Ma Twai was very calm, as she perched herself on the highest stone and looked upstream at the coming floods. She was confident and tranquillised now that she knew Ian was present. It mattered nothing that he could not swim to her—he would see they were saved somehow. It was an odd scene, because one always associates floods with cloudy skies and lowering stormy airs; but now, in the hot sun under the bluest sky, it seemed incongruous—unreal.

The usually safe ford was now a deadly channel, and the water rose till the circle of green grass where they stood was damp to their feet.

In another few minutes the boy was back, dragging a long rope in loose loops, panting with haste:

"Than Dine is seeking Donalbain thakin—I could not find Tha Kwe!" he jerked out, as he handed Ian the rope—heedless that it was no use doing so.

"Help, quickly, thakin!" came Ma Twai's

clear tones across the water. "It is going to sweep us off soon—my ankles are wet now."

But still there was no fear in her voice, though they could see Ma See was crying openly.

Ian was desperate. He could not swim a stroke himself, lamed as he was, and if there was to be a sudden big rush of water—which might happen any moment——

And even as he watched, the thing he feared approached—a swift roll of water was hurled down the river, and the two figures were up to their knees.

Then Ma Twai stretched out her hands and gave another cry.

"Thakin—oh, thakin!"

He hardly knew what he was doing in the second that followed. Wildly he began pulling off his coat—stepped towards the brink like a man in a dream—when, quickly as a panther slips from cover, the big Scot came running down the jungle edge, and had grasped the whole danger as he came.

"What are ye doing, ye young fule?" he cried, as he halted by him. "Get back there! Coming, lass!"

In one wink he had torn off his coat and boots, and had knotted the rope round his waist.

"Ye've your work cut oot to pay it to me!" he said briefly, and with a bound was in the stream; while Ian held on to the coil, and gauged

its slackness rightly to meet the swimmer's needs.

Donalbain was a magnificent swimmer, but he too had his work cut out. That current was a thing to make a nightmare for years after; but he held on well, and presently the little group broke into a cheer as they saw him hang on to the isle's first rock and pull himself to his feet and stand up to his waist in water, but still stand—on the land of it.

To knot the rope to the rock, and for Ma Twai to start hand-over-handing herself along in the deeper water, was the affair of two minutes. The current tugged and dragged at her slender, pink-robed figure as she clung to it and hauled herself steadily across.

She had reached the middle, when Ian gave a shout of warning and horror. Down the stream a great log of timber was being hurled —twisting, bobbing, capable of snapping the rope, or striking her dead with a blow.

If it passed endwise the rope, nearest the isle side where the higher rock held it clear, well and good, but if it passed broadwise on Ian's side, where he and the others were bound to hold the rope at best shoulder-high, since there was no tree within reach to hold it, it would either snap the rope or sweep her away.

For one breathless gasp Ian felt as if his heart stood still, as he saw the great trunk sweep on,

broadside—and the glossy, black, coil-crowned head dipped down—the hands let go, and vanished in the brown depths.

Then a shout went up from the Burmans, sharp, triumphant as a hound's cry. She had done the one wise thing—dived down to meet it under the scudding mass, and come up again on the safe side, as it swept under the rope, and her little hands were grasping the rope again—safe!

The Burmese boy, fired by her courage, rushed waist-deep into the water to meet her, and just in time to help her to land, for her strength was almost done; and as he pulled her up on to the yellow shore, she fainted away.

Donalbain shouted to more of them to hold the rope, as Ma See dared not start across alone, and then they came over together easily, for he could hold on with one arm, and help her with the other occasionally, so that in a few minutes they all stood safely on the sand.

Flinging down the rope end, Ian bent over Ma Twai, who was opening her eyes again, and was feeling her wrist even before Ma See, now chattering wildly with excitement, could get to her. He was trembling strangely, now that the strain was over, and as her eyes sought his he felt almost as shaken as she.

"Thakin——" she murmured, so low that the others could not hear the words. "I feared terribly—I thought I was going to lose you——"

Suddenly the magic of her nearness seized upon him, even as it had done in the bungalow. Her fingers touching his hand, wrenched asunder his resolution of self-restraint, and he could bear silence no longer.

The sight of her dainty head going down, it might have been for ever, had shown him what it would be to lose her, his brave little forest-love, and he felt, absurdly enough, as though this danger had somehow been his fault.

Equally unheard by the others, he leant down on pretext of helping her to her feet, and said in her ear :

" Ma Twai, koungoke athet (my life), if you will, you need never lose me again ! "

And as Donalbain came up she could only murmur one word back :

" Yes ! thakin ! "

CHAPTER XII

PREPARATION

Ma See was talking at the top of her voice to Donalbain, praising his courage at plunging to their rescue, and he laughed and cut her short.

"Once thanking me will do, Ma See! It was lucky that I was near. Ian, old man, there's the dak-runner coming away from the bungalow—we'd better go up and see if there's any particular news."

They could see the brown man, with his bright yellow pasoh, gliding away towards the hut, where he would rest before his return, among the trees.

Ma Twai's eyes narrowed as she watched him, but she said not a word, and went off with her mother towards their house, to change their wet lungis, with scarcely a glance at Ian either, but in a wild blaze of joy.

Ian felt a sudden thrill as he saw the dak-runner vanish. Was there now some word from Kate—some last repentant saving letter? He

quite gasped as they mounted the little rise toward the bungalow, and Donalbain, thinking him faint, offered him his arm.

"Mustn't do too much yet," he said, as Falconer waved to them impatiently to hurry with the box-key, from the veranda.

They got up and poured the contents of the box on the table. There were two for Donalbain, two for Falconer, and for Ian—only a postcard from a half-forgotten maiden-lady cousin in Australia.

He moved away, and sat down with averted head, apparently to read a magazine which had come for Falconer.

The die was cast—Kate had kept silence, and Ma Twai had spoken. But how was he to tell Donalbain ?

Even as he wondered, like some finger of fate, the Scot looked up with a sudden exclamation from the letter he was reading.

"Ma conscience ! I'll have to go to Mandalay ! Here's my Auntie Minnie and her lassie Susie come up to Mandalay on the boat—thought they'd do Burma while they were on their way to Japan,—and they say they've had a thief of a Madrasi servant, and no end of bother—will I come down and take awa' their bad impression of the country, if I possibly can ! I could go if it wasn't for leaving you now—but——"

"Oh, get along—do go, Angus ; and I'll come

down too—I must have a change," broke in Falconer quickly. "M'Rosse won't take any harm now, and you've nothing but what he can keep an eye on, for a week, that could go wrong."

"It'll mean a fortnight when I do get down, unless auntie comes up here back with me," replied Donalbain slowly. "But ye're right—a change to the water would put you straight quicker than sticking on here. Besides, Susie's got a bonnie tocher to her name—you might amuse her a bit—wha' kens ?"

"You'd better go, Donalbain," said Ian in a voice which felt very queer to his own ears, but which they didn't seem to notice as wrong. "I can set the men on, all right even if I *am* lame. We can leave that far tract on Panshwe side till you come back. Besides, if the old lady wants you, it's hardly fair to leave her stranded in Mandalay, which she won't enjoy unless you depart to show her round. You could catch the down-mail boat in the morning if you got up very early."

"I'll have to go to-night, because I can't stick on a pony yet—must take the bullock-cart," said Falconer ruefully. "But it's worth it. You'd better come too, Donalbain—we can sleep at the D. S. P's. even if we do land there about midnight. . . ."

He was as eager as a schoolboy to set off, fired with a convalescent's desire for the journey

which would make him feel as if he were well again.

Ian watched them pack and make ready as he might have watched the figures in a dream. Then, when with cheery farewells Falconer had creaked off upon the cart (Donalbain rode, however), he turned back into the house and sat thinking for perhaps half an hour. Then he called to Than Dine sharply :

" Go down and tell Ma See I shall be pleased if she will come up and speak to me ! "

" Shall I tell her to bring some more oil—ours is done, if the thakin wants his head rubbing," said the boy practically, as he made for the door.

" No, it is only to see her," replied Ian, and then immediately reflected he was foolish, since now the lugale would wonder what he would want with Ma See at this hour. Then again, he thought, it would not matter, since the village would surely know hereafter what was in the wind. Then he sat down to await her coming and smoked steadily.

When Ma See and Ma Twai arrived home, they were too busy changing their dripping clothes to notice a letter upon the big teak chest near the door. It was addressed to Ma Twai in the neat Burmese characters, which a careful Government school teaches to its young officials and sealed with a rude seal, not unlike a uniform

button's indenting, with red office wax. Ma Twai's clear skin flushed up and then went quite sallow as she caught sight of it. She could not read, but she knew its meaning only too well.

"Peaceful One's Name!" exclaimed her mother. "What are you going to do?"

"I cannot take it to any poonjee in Mingaing to read it—it would ruin me now," replied her daughter, sinking down on the matting.

"Well?" questioned the older woman anxiously. "We had better know what is in it. He might appear here suddenly—he must be living, since he writes at all. If it is to say that he is returning here, we could write back and say we are going to Mandalay."

But Ma Twai had rallied, her first shock over.

"I am not your daughter for nothing," she said firmly. "You escaped from Mandalay siege by a trick—am I less inventive? I will take the letter to Panshwe, where, in the post, by good luck, is a fresh Babu. I will tell him that I am Ma Twai Glay's cousin, and that she is dead—so will he please return this letter to the sender! I know this is done sometimes, because Donalbain thakin got a letter meant for some other man, and he took it back with him thus. My heart's dear, my mother—Ian thakin told me to-day that he loves me—shall we ruin my life for this wretched son of a dog here? Let him get another wife up whither he wanders—his sergeant's pay will soon

buy him one. I love a white thakin—I will never give him up!"

"What need, my soul's delight," chuckled Ma See with relief. "If he weds you he will take you away before—he can return—Mala, Than Dine, what brings you here?"

Than Dine's gaudy pink goung-boung and checked pasoh suddenly appeared at the open door.

"Ian thakin sends for you, Ma See—he would speak with you," he said importantly.

"Not for me?" asked Ma Twai quickly.

"Peace, foolish maid," whispered her mother. "In his country they often speak to the mother before the daughter—my sister told me so."

She dived quickly into the inner room to change her lungi for her second best green silk tamein, and to put in her emerald nadoungs, and Ma Twai took the chance when Than Dine's back was turned to slip the letter into hiding. It would never do to let him spy it, for the forest Burman's curiosity into his neighbours' affairs has to be seen to be credited.

Presently Ian, sitting in his long chair, heard a shuffling at the veranda steps, and Ma See's smiling, wrinkled visage shone under the rays of the big lamp as she shikoed ceremoniously.

He saw that she had gold pins in her hair and her best velvet slippers, and the fact irritated him a trifle. Were these folk mind-readers that

she should guess so soon? He hardly thought Ma Twai would have told her of what passed that afternoon as yet—the idea jarred him.

"Have a cigarette, Ma See," he said politely, after returning her greeting.

"The thakin is very kind," she replied, and squatted on the leopard-skin mat before him.

"Ma Twai is very beautiful," said he, trying oddly to avoid the immediate point, in deference to her fashion, yet not succeeding very well.

"My daughter is the star of the village," returned Ma See. "Even in Mandalay there is nothing to compare with her. She is virtuous as the holy Princess Mayah (Mother of the Buddha). She will be precious indeed to the man who marries her." She paused and puffed at her cigarette with huge enjoyment.

"You must have seen that I admire Ma Twai greatly," said Ian, and felt himself flushing in the dusk. "If she were my wife I should be extremely happy!"

Ma See clicked her tongue against her teeth in an admirable assumption of amazement.

"Tck! Tck! Tck! But the thakin is jesting?"

"No. I wish to marry Ma Twai. Will you give her to me?"

Confound the old woman! Why did she add to his embarrassment like this?

"Ma Twai, it is true, loves the thakin—but I

have half promised her to Moung San Boh, the rich elephant contractor of Kanhla. He has offered a magnificent present to me and a thousand rupees."

Ian laughed. He expected this, knowing the Burmese craze for bargaining.

"I can give nothing like that! But I will give five hundred and some splendid gold bangles, and a daleezan with sapphires——"

But she shook her head and sent rings of smoke upwards scornfully.

"No—no. Make it another two hundred rupees, thakin. She is worth it! Moung San Boh will give more, if only for her beautiful long hair. And she will be quite rich herself when I attain the Great Peace. You do but store the money up for yourself again," she added cunningly.

Ian felt quick disgust rise at her greed, but then, he reflected, it was her native custom, and besides, if he gave in to her demands too soon, she would consider him as a fool. To earn a native's respect, you must make him climb down to you, in any bargain whatsoever.

"Well, I will give no more. Think it over, Ma See. It is true that I love Ma Twai, but then, if I go away down to Rangoon, I may see another fair maid and bring her back with me," he said impatiently.

There was a slight sound in the doorway. He

looked up and saw that Ma Twai herself stood there, her curiosity and eagerness having triumphed over everything else and brought her to the scene of action just at the critical moment.

Ian looked, turned to her, and said with a patient calmness he was very far from feeling :

" Ma Twai, beloved, I fear we must part. Your mother and I cannot agree upon matters."

His tone was blunt and hard, and Ma Twai flitted across the floor with a startled little cry.

" But what is this ? I love him ! " she said in Burmese to her mother. " Ah, Ian thakin mine — give her what she asks — to part will kill me ! "

" Have patience, silly child—he will give it," hissed her mother in her ear.

" He will not—I know his iron look—he wears it now. If you do not give me, I will go to him for nothing. Shall I lose my heart's adored for a hundred rupees ? " snapped out the girl, and knelt by Ian's chair, laughing up at him, as one who is very sure of her will.

" I am yours, thakin, if she will consent."

" I will give you fifty rupees more—not another anna ! You are too greedy, Ma See—bethink you, she will have many presents from me after we are married," Ian flung at her across Ma Twai's gleaming, dusky hair.

" Five hundred and fifty is very little—but it

must serve if Ma Twai also says yes," grumbled the old woman. "One must sometimes please one's only child! You will have a big pwe for the feast also? When will you be ready?" she added, all in a breath.

He looked down into Ma Twai's wonderful dark eyes and smiled.

"As soon as you can arrange it will suit me. Then we will go a little journey into camp, if I am strong enough to ride, within a week or so. It is the custom of my people to make wedding journeys, and there is work to be overseen on Panshwe side. I would like to see it before Donalbain thakin returns."

Now the bargain was safely clinched, Ma See gave rein to her joy by cracking every joint in her strong brown fingers. Ian, forgetful of everything else, turned Ma Twai's glowing face upwards, and, saying "English fashion, this, Ma Twai," crushed her lips, soft as the petals of crimson roses, closely against his, while her mother's laughter echoed merrily through the warm night air.

CHAPTER XIII

INTOXICATION

THE next few days glided by for Ian like some strange delicious dream. A complete calm seemed to have fallen upon him, now that his decision was made and the cup of Lethe's waters raised to his lips by Ma Twai's hands. With a will stronger than he had guessed himself to own, he banished his memories of Europe and of Kate, and threw himself into the deep woods, whose wonderful intoxicating scents breathe forgetfulness.

In many brown lands the white man is rightly repelled, and reluctant to taste of the popular life and habits, but in Burma they are enchanting enough to excuse much; a suave, dainty, silken folk, who are happy and dreamfully easy enough to infect any Westerner (if he stays long) with oblivion of his own world.

In the warm forests the air was glowing with love and life. The great tree-flowers seemed to Ian now deeper and richer in colour,

the flitting, gorgeously feathered birds to have a sweeter chime of cries—and in the very rippling of the river he found new delight.

It was the lotus spell, which, while it lasts, has no bitterness to taint its subtle sweetness; and all circumstances combined to strengthen its powers, since Donalbain was still away, and no one from the outer world came near the bungalow at Mingaing.

Ma Twai too, with the wisdom of the Eastern woman in love, left Ian much alone during the days before their joys' height, and, with Ma See, prepared busily for the festival of her heart.

Ian gave her the money for his own gifts of a magnificent gold daleezan and bracelets, and a wonderfully embroidered tamein, since she was much more capable than he of choosing and bargaining for them, and on this errand the two women went alone to Panshwe.

They had hired, very cheaply, from Oo Bwin, his bullock-cart, and as they jolted along Ma See said:

"Why should we buy a tamein at all? You could keep the money he has given you, and he will never know, if you wear the splendid one Supayalat gave me when I told her about—ah—something she wished to know! It is in the big chest at home, not a thread the worse. You could buy a set of gold jacket-buttons, or give me the money—I will need it when you are gone, my heart!"

"It is a good thought," replied her daughter; "but will not some of the other women tell him that the tamein's bordering is old in pattern?"

"Truly, I had not thought of that," said Ma See. "But if we buy a scarf from Ma Hmwé Pan, she will lend us, for a trifle, the best modern tamein she has in her shop. Ian thakin will never know when we return it to her after, and I will then give you the Supayalat's gift, ma mée."

Ma Twai chuckled as she fingered the small bag of rupees in her sash, and soon they alighted at the house of Ma Hla, a rich paddy-farmer's wife, with whom they were to stay the night, and, after greeting her politely, went down the bazaar on their economically curtailed shopping.

Though Panshwe is a steamer-port on the great river, its bazaar is small, for its real market lies on the big "cargo flats" which are towed up weekly by the ships, curious whale-shaped erections with two stories, on each of which are rows of little stalls, under the dusk of whose awnings sit gaily clad barterers, ready to chaffer with the villagers who wait in throngs on the bank, ready to invade the flat as soon as the file of lascars have (like so many blue porpoises) plopped overboard with the mooring rope, and dragged the ship to gang-plank distance.

The top section of this aquatic mart is devoted to the hardware and everything not

indigenous to the Upper Lands, the lower to the vegetables and fruits; and in the former, like black-eyed, flower-bedecked dolls in their niches, sit the matrons and maids selling silks and muslins in gleaming rolls, smoking cheroots, or pretending to re-coil their glossy hair over their half-moon-shaped ivory combs, so that the passers-by may see it is all of their own growing.

There are heaps of quaint, flat sandals, some velvet-lined and gold worked upon the toe-straps; piles of dainty slippers, some of plaited grass, others of sewn leather, with curious parchment-like stiff soles; and close by them may be seen a comb-seller's trays, with dozens of round sandal or teak wood, crescent combs, and the more expensive ivory and silver inlaid ones, and jars full of the skewer-shaped ivory hairpins made from the splinters of the tusks in the ivory carvers' stocks.

Strings of brass cowbells glisten in the lamp-light, round and square, closed like little nuts or open like shells, according to the use on neck or between the horns of their wearers; and nice little brass goungs for offerings at pagodas clank beside them.

At another stall are tins of European biscuits, and jams in tightly soldered drums, and precious jars of pickles, which only the well-to-do can afford. Strung in fascinating rows are weirdly

carven dolls of wood and papier-mâché, some with jointed limbs, which move when the gay strings are pulled, and below them snarl wooden dogs, gilded and painted like the queer creatures of some dream.

Other stalls hold baskets of gleaming sugar-candy (kyan tha ga), and pink-and-white sweet biscuits by the sackful, while great sticks of the pure sugar-cane bristle from odd corners, and the snowy mounds of grated cocoanut tempt the coins from the sashes quicker than real snow melts.

No less Burmese is the lower flat, where the fruits hold sway, piled in lacquer boxes and strangely woven baskets, each quaint enough to be a curio in the West—full of needful things: dried chestnuts from the Hills, chillies, sugary heaps of preserved Chinese ginger brought over the frontier from Bhamo, limes gleaming greenly, dried fish and jaggery, three-cornered cubes of cutch, that rich brown dye, fried garlic, and funny little ground-nuts, neighbouring gaudy-papered boxes of Chinese tea, while heaps of dried prawns and pots of that awfully stinking caviare of Burma—ngapee—fish paste, scent the air unpleasantly. Big Chinese hams dangle from the stall-posts, above baskets of dampish walnuts, and heaps of leaf-tobacco and betel, and bags of thanaka bark for making the national cosmetique, do their best to counteract the smell

of the ngapee, but not very well. Dried beans, pine-apples, gram and vermicelli, and boiled toddy from the toddy palm, and a hundred other odd wares, fill the shady flat, and from the bows live chickens squall dismally from their coops, and the ponies of sundry travellers stamp in roughly improvised stalls, while their grooms gamble cheerfully at fan-tan or chess, or some queer game of their different tribes.

Ma See therefore betook herself to the upper story, where she squatted before the neat stall of Ma Hmwé Pan (Mrs Fragrant Flower), and lit the cheroot that the latter hospitably proffered, as salt to their bargaining; but Ma Twai had meanwhile remained ashore, and gone to the little post-office near the bank, where the steamers tie up. Here she announced herself to the polite Babu clerk (newly appointed to Panshwe) as the cousin of one Ma Twai Glay, recently deceased, and begged him to return to the sender the unwelcome letter which had so disturbed her the day of the flooded river. Naturally, he accepted her identity, offered her his sympathy for her cousin's death, and opened the letter, which had the sender's name and address neatly written within, and re-directed it at once.

Then having comfortably buried her past, Ma Twai marched out of the post-office, and hurried off to the floating market to join her mother, and

transact the delightfully important business of ordering in the provisions for her wedding feast; and the airs she gave herself over the business to the merchants, and the consequent deference they showed her, filled her worldly little soul with joy.

They bought piles of curry, rice, and ngapee, and heaps of weird sweetmeats and biscuits (actually four tins of "Europe" ones, too), three dozen tins of best sardines, and a dozen of potted foreign lobster, and a pound or two of pickled tea, "Lepaik," which is sent out in lieu of invitation cards, in tiny packets, some days before any function in Burma. At the local store in the village as well, Ma See bought three dozen bottles of "Lem'nade," and several chatties of toddy and some Kachin beer, since, though it is a coarse drink, several Kachins were invited to the feast.

Ma Twai listened to the laden bullock-cart's creaks on the homeward journey with infinite satisfaction.

Her mother's house had never looked prettier than it did upon the morning of the wedding day, for she had held anxious conference with Than Dine as to what was "marriage customs" in the thakin's country, and he, having heard from a table boy who had been in European service in Rangoon and beheld the glories of a white ceremony, had told her that to put many flowers

about was correct. So they had made garlands of marigolds and a feathery, dreamy, jungle-flower like jessamine, and festooned them about the doorposts and piles. On the carved shelves Ma Twai put their best silver bowls, and filled other jars with scarlet hibiscus and branches of temple-blossoms, and set a dish of hot coal which diffused strong perfume of sandalwood and oils, and stuck joss-sticks in a low lacquer vessel amid fine sand, just below the nat's cocoanut, which had donned its best embroidered and sequined bag.

Ma Pyu, neighbourly soul, had lent them all her lacquer dishes and brass chatties, and Than Dine lent plenty of muslin fly-covers to protect the contents, spread on the ring of fine mats on the ground below the veranda, for so many guests could never all squat at once in the front room.

On Ma See's best string bed were laid the bridal tamein and scarf, and the bride hovered about, peering into her little steel mirror admiring the daleezan on her neck, and trying on the velvet slippers with their gold and mock-pearl-worked straps, until presently the guests began to arrive.

The girls came first, a laughing, flower-decked group, robed in silks like the rainbow, bangles jingling, big nadoungs twinkling in ears, and pushing playfully in front handsome Ma Pyu, whose slender, ivory-tinted hands bore a very

long gold chain, like two English muff-chains together, of whose curious use more anon. Then the older women, some of whom presented Ma See with bowls of rice for the feast, and after them the young bachelors, who chaffed the girls as they neared the house and pretended to pelt them with marigold heads, and lastly the village elders, led by Oo Shwe Bwin in his snowy pasoh and goung-boung, and very tight patent-leather European shoes, which he doffed at the door with a sigh of mingled pride and relief.

Then Ma Twai came out, arrayed in the splendid rose-coloured tamein and exquisitely embroidered coat, the daleezan shining round her throat, the heavy-twisted, lion-headed gold bracelets on her wrists, and a real gold comb between the clusters of wistaria above her ears, greeting everyone with smiling jests. But long afterwards Ma Pyu said she had noted that she had worn a queerly anxious look very often during the afternoon, particularly when anyone came in suddenly.

And as Ian rode up to the dainty house, set in its green background, and saw the merry crowd with their welcoming cries and smiling faces, he thought sardonically of the contrast between this primitive marriage festival and the average London wedding reception—the bored expressions, the spiteful comments of guests on bride, bridegroom, and gifts, the probably rainy

day, the bridegroom's nervous waiting at the conspicuous altar. He laughed aloud as he sprang upon the veranda, and yet—there was a certain hardness in that laugh. Then he saw Ma Twai sitting on a raised seat, something between a sofa and a stool, and he shut the door of his English memories tightly, and met her ardent gaze with a smile that drew delighted tongue-clickings from Ma See and her cronies.

Oo Shwe Bwin, representing the old, and San Nyohn the young men of the village, conducted Ian to the seat of honour, a long chair covered with a sequin-glittering drapery, and Ma See, in the magnificent tamein of Supayalat (to be her daughter's afterwards !), shikoed with dignity to her prospective son-in-law.

At a Burmese wedding there is no special religious ceremony, but the village elders make speeches, and then if anyone feels moved to do so, he says aloud any lucky prayer or proverb which occurs to him. Sometimes two will be gabbling away together, quite regardless that nobody is paying them any special attention.

Ma See opened the set speeches, no wise troubled with modesty of her own possessions.

"I have great joy," she said, "in giving my beautiful daughter to so brave a man as the thakin Ian, the slayer of the tigress, the prince of hunters. She is the fairest maiden ever seen in Mingaing—or indeed in Mandalay,—fairer than

the princesses of Alomphra's house, and she has hair like silk, and walks like an elephant" (meaning with dignity). "It is a gift of royal worth I give you to-day, Ian thakin, and you will find your joy in her increases continually. She has more talents than a daughter of the good nats, for she can sing, weave, and roll cheroots better than any girl in Burma. Her skin is white as the temple-flowers (!), and her eyes glow like the rising sun. Take thus my pearl, and may you attain the Great Peace, and be free from the five evils and diseases of the soul. The costly price you paid me last week is but a tenth of her value."

Then Oo Shwe Bwin spoke on behalf of the village.

"We are all very glad to see the marriage of the brave thakin Ian to our beautiful Ma Twai Glay, and we wish them every happiness on the Upward Path to Nek'ban," he said, beaming round on all.

"We have never had a thakin among us whom we have liked so well, nor who is so brave and strong. It is quite fitting that he should have Ma Twai Glay, who will give him every joy. Donalbain thakin will be very sorry to have been absent, but we shall tell him of this fine feast on his return. We are all witnesses to the marriage, and trust to see their happiness continued for many rains. I think they may drink from the same cup."

Ma Pyu now offered Ian a silver bowl, and he drank, and passed it to Moung San Nyohn, who handed it to Ma Twai, who grimaced at the strong spirit it held. A little rice on a silver platter was likewise passed to each, and Oo Shwe Bwin would have spoken again, when the doorway was shadowed by a tall figure robed in the deep yellow of the poonjees from the kyoung. He held a lacquer alms-bowl before him and spoke no word. Ma See started at this unusual visit and was slow in moving to offer the tribute he insinuated, and when she rose and took two rupees from her sash, Ma Twai, half fearing her mother's religious zeal would select something more valuable, made a quick movement to check her—and then stopped short; but the monk's apparently too elevated regard marked this.

"Merit is acquired, elder sister," he said to Ma See, "but the daughter's way will be harder than she knows, when her soul still craves for the dust of profits and existences."

He turned and went out as suddenly as he had come, and Ma Twai shivered violently. Knowing —*what* she knew—the monk's words seemed of ill omen indeed.

But she rallied instantly, and responded to her bridesmaids' jests, for they now teased her unmercifully, while the other elders made speeches like Oo Shwe Bwin's to the bridegroom.

The sun's rays now slanted lower through the

doorposts, so Ian rose and made for them, but in a trice the young bachelors, headed by Moung San Nyohn, barred his way, laughingly demanding a toll, and stretched before him a long gold chain as barrier. He paid the tribute in silver and jokes, and took another step, only to meet Ma Pyu and her joyous bevy, who held in a circle their long gold chain, and pent him till he had paid them also, saluting his apt retorts with shrieks of mirth.

Next on the top veranda step he halted, and scattered to the lesser guests below, who had not been invited to squeeze upstairs, a handful of rupees amidst clamorous merriment.

Then he mounted his pony and galloped to the bungalow, to fetch some things he did not care to leave to Than Dine, and also to give Ma Twai time to do the honours of the feast,—at which, had he been a Burman bridegroom, he must have remained.

He had planned this rather unusual little wedding journey away from the village, partly from longing for the forest's quiet, and partly to avoid the curious custom of Burmese bachelordom, of throwing (to express their envy) heavy stones upon the happy pair's roof that night.

At last Than Dine came in, and importantly dealt round to the coolies the powerful hurricane lamps in case dusk overtook them before they reached the forest camp, and Ian mounted and

rode after them towards the edge of the village. There, upon a gaily-draped bullock-cart, sat Ma Twai Glay, and Ma See stood by the little white bullocks' heads, wailing (for effect), and pretending to tear her long grey-streaked hair, surrounded by the laughing maidens.

"Such a pity you cannot stay for the pwe, to-night," said Ma Pyu, as the several men of the escort touched up their ponies to go.

Ma Twai put on the most charming air of disdain.

"Pwe! What is a pwe, when I must follow my husband?"

She looked at Ian and laughed low and happily, just as the setting sun glowed up in a flamy golden mist, and the cart moved on—into the forest.

CHAPTER XIV

DECLENSION

When Kate and Gertrude arrived in town by an afternoon train, the latter made no demur at ringing up Carrie Clifford, who promptly offered to get Kate an invitation, and chaperone her to the Herald dance.

Although Gertrude was quite aware of how matters were turning with Ulf and her stepdaughter, she very wisely made no comment, as she entirely approved of the youth's position and good looks. She felt like a clever jockey with a good but "uncertain" mount, which it would be fatal to urge on at this stage of the race, lest it should "shut up entirely," and she resolved to wait until Kate should herself confide in her.

They spent the next morning (Thursday) in seeing off Aunt Nora, General Iden's wife, who was starting for Rangoon, to join her husband. She was an excellent sailor, so the Bay in winter had no terrors for her, and she was sailing by

the Bibby Line from Liverpool that evening, and departed rejoicing that she would escape the smothering train journey overland.

But when Kate and Gertrude arrived home for lunch they found a wire from the faithful maid of Gertrude's mother's sister, saying that her mistress was very ill with bronchitis. She was her last surviving aunt, a dear old spinster, and she lived alone in Edinburgh, so that Mrs Iden unhesitatingly prepared to catch the evening express.

"It means a week, at least, up there," she said to Kate, as she drank her tea, after two hours' hasty packing. "But you will be all right, for cook knows everything, and here are my keys, and my jewel-case is in the safe. If you go to the League meeting on Tuesday, explain my absence to Mrs Cawdor—and I think that's about all."

So she went off, and Kate counted the hours till Sunday afternoon, when she had arranged to meet Ulf at the Ritz for tea.

Banquor, that excellent gooseberry, came too, bringing a shy little Scotch girl-cousin of sixteen, who was having the treat of a week in London with her imposing aunt, the Duchess.

As Ulf seemed to have something on his mind, Kate asked him what it was.

"My father's very angry because some loose cash I've invested has gone wrong," he stated ambiguously.

And certainly various dubious steeple-chase favourites had been risky "investments" for five hundred pounds. Also a respectable county gentleman, who suffers from the same initials as his son, is naturally annoyed when several other bills for frivolous items are forwarded to him by mistake.

Kate, however, did not question further, and the matter dropped.

Banquor drove Kate and Ulf home as well in his little electric coupé, and as she waited for the page to open her door, Ulf whispered to her: "I'll look in between five and six to-morrow, sweetest—we can have a few minutes in the dusk," and she smiled and left him, to dream delightfully for the rest of the evening.

She could hardly believe the transformation such a few days had wrought in herself. Her usually well-liked tasks of League work, such as writing encouraging letters to new recruits, answering inquiries, doing her column for *The Leaguers' Lantern*, all seemed perfect nuisances when she wanted to sit painting pictures of Ulf in her joyfully rioting fancy. She imagined their life together on some sunny station in the Mediterranean, and in after years at his beautiful English home—and wondered what his mother was like. She must be a lovely woman, surely, —yes, he had said she was still greatly admired.

And so she planned till, smiling, she fell asleep.

She was eagerly looking forward to the dance on Monday, but alas! about lunch-time, one of her neuralgic headaches began. They did not often torment her, but when they did, it meant hours of real torture.

She bore it till tea-time, lying on the hearth bearskin, a great fluffy cushion under her head, trying to lure forgetfulness of pain with a book, but in vain.

Tea was standing on the small Syrian mosaic table, when Ulf came in.

"My poor little Kitzi! You do look bad!" he cried as the page retreated, and kissed her tenderly, and, camping on a stool by her, drew her to his shoulder with soothing clasp.

"It's one of my 'heads,' dear," she murmured. "I do hope it will go away before to-night—have some tea while it's hot," she continued, rousing herself.

But presently, stirred by the hot liquid, the agony in her forehead stung beyond ordinary endurance. She had a remedy, but one which she would never use till the pain was quite intolerable.

She rose, and found in her desk some tiny brown tabloids, each holding a very minute dose of morphia, belladonna, and strychnine, which her doctor had given her for these headaches, and swallowed one with a drink of tea.

"What's that, Kitzi?" queried Ulf, from where he lay on the rug.

"Poison!" she said, smiling mischievously, like a child who plays at being an ogre. "Poison, to kill the pain! It will die in an hour, and then I'll be quite well to-night!"

A quick frown passed over his face, but she was putting away the box and did not notice it. Her innocent mind never dreamed of the conclusion that his—corrupted by his knowledge of a worse world—drew of her action.

"Shall I leave you to have a good rest? Perhaps I'd better," he said, and would have risen, but she dropped beside him and passed him another cake instantly.

"No—don't! It takes my thoughts off the pain when you are here." And they sat talking till, an hour later, the page coughed and scuffled in the hall, to signify that he wanted to remove the tray.

The pain passed gradually, and by the time Kate had dressed, and eaten her solitary dinner of pheasant and charlotte russe, she felt almost well; and when Mrs Clifford's car arrived for her she ran down with a light step.

But as Mrs Clifford slipped off her ermine coat, she missed a valuable diamond brooch, and ten minutes of exciting hunting on the floor elapsed before she luckily found it sticking to her gown tail, which delayed their entry into the ballroom, so that the first dance was in progress before they greeted Lady Herald.

Then, to Kate's disgust, she saw Ulf whirling round with a wonderful eau-de-nil creation in his arms. Her throat tightened as she recognised the gleaming, ruddy, waved head of Llora Colmes-Inch.

"He might have waited five minutes for me!" she thought hotly.

"Who's Miss Academy-Portrait of The Mayor's Daughter?" asked Llora, eyeing Kate superciliously. She could find nothing amiss with either dress or wearer, but this inanely spiteful idea.

Ulf was weak enough to wonder if she saw anything in Kate to warrant it, and answered in a non-committal tone:

"Rather a jolly girl—a Miss Iden. One of the Feminine League crowd, but not violently rampant. Is there anything wrong with her get-up?"

"Oh, no—only rather High Arty," replied Llora, in a voice that suggested something very much amiss, but that she was too charitable to name.

And then, very deftly, but quite undetectably, she began the atrocious game known to women as "setting him against" the girl whose beauty and freshness made her secretly feel the artificiality of her own artistic "touchings up."

The seeds she sowed, unhappily, found soft soil. Ulf's first flush of passion spent, he was beginning to reflect seriously as to his next move.

When Banquor accused him of having no serious intentions, he had faced him very pompously; but when he said "I intend to see it through," he ought to have added, "until I get tired."

Ah, well, he thought, as he went to claim his next dance with Kate, he would soon hear the result of certain investigations he had set afoot, when he was down at home on the Thursday . . . and then he would see! . . .

Meanwhile, Kate's face was very sweet, and he must trust to luck to "get out" later, if need be.

She had, meanwhile, revenged herself for the first dance, by giving Banquor the second, and reserving only two more for the truant, later.

His air was sheepish as he approached.

"I couldn't help the first," he said half-defiantly. "Llorrie grabbed my empty programme from me as I was taking it from the tray, and I wasn't sharp enough to say it was booked."

"I've the third and eighth left," replied Kate.

He smiled his most charming smile.

"Very well, I'll say how awfully sorry I am."

But to her dismay, she saw him dance the fourth with Llora.

During the third they sat out, in the ballroom near Carrie, and Kate's anxiety grew, for he seemed so altered—sceptical—almost casual in his speech.

Llora was sitting near them with a gay thing in Guardsmen, and Kate watched Ulf's eyes wander to her with fierce anger in her mind.

Llora's daringly cut exquisite frock, the great diamond glittering on her long neck, her haughty, flashing, belladonna'd eyes, her insolent air of "I am the Only Right Thing," made her own sweet white satin dress and simple row of pearls feel pale—out of it!

She did not guess as yet, however, that Ulf's altered manner was due to his weaker will being plastic enough to be moulded by a vicious woman's hard spite, but still she hated Llora with all a good girl's hate for a thoroughly bad one.

Then she made the natural mistake of showing it to the bone of contention.

"I wish you wouldn't dance with that woman again—I don't like her," she said, as he took her to get an ice.

"Llorrie? Pooh! Why, I've known her for years—she'd think it awfully queer if I dropped her now. But I will after we're married," he answered. And Kate clung to this slender consolation all night.

Yet, when she was homeward bound in the car, her headache returned violently, and it was five o'clock before she could sleep.

CHAPTER XV

EXPOSURE

Uncle Jim Siward did not often go racing, but as it happened that a friend's horse in which he had taken interest, since it was a fluffy foal, was running, he went down to Gatwick on the day after Lady Herald's dance.

He had not seen Kate since her return from Bournemouth, as he had been into Warwickshire for that week-end, and had again run up to town before going home to Yorkshire on Wednesday.

He saw the young chestnut win comfortably, and then went to the station, as he was dining with a man at the Union Jack Club that evening.

He got into a carriage which contained only two other men, one a tall fair youth perfectly turned out from shining head to correct boots, the other a quiet elderly fellow in a country tailor's best attempt at a suit, an enamelled horse's-head tie-pin, and a deferential manner to his companion. The train was a minute late in starting, and they spoke, heedless of Uncle

Jim's unobtrusive presence behind his paper in the corner.

"Now, about Miss Iden? You inquired?" said the youth.

Uncle Jim pricked up his ears and sat very still.

"Well, I went to Somerset House, sir, and I looked for the will of the young lady's father; Colonel Richard Iden was correct—and he left her——"

A sudden blast from the engine drowned the man's voice.

"Only *that*? Why, I thought she'd have had treble!" said the youth, unguardedly raising his voice, and a dismayed look flushing all his fair-skinned face. "Good Lord! I *should* have had a 'sell'! Nothing there to help pull the land together again. What a fraud! Why, her step-mother hinted to Lord Banquor that people quite hunted her for her fortune. Egad! Did her own mother leave her any more?"

A rumbling bridge prevented Uncle Jim's hearing the result of the investigation. Then the youth continued.

"Even both together, it's nothing for my wife to have."

"Well, sir, I hope you will find a really likely mistress for the old Park when you do bring your bride home," said the steward, for such he was. "I always think of Lord Tennyson's able poem

about the Northern farmer, where he says that—ah—it's as easy to choose a wife with money as without. And your lady mother thinks the same, sir."

"Yes. Fortunately I've not gone too far to draw back. I can get out of it all right. Thanks very much, Simpcox—you're a good sort, and when I'm reigning at the Park, I'll make it straight with you. Now what about Shylockstein? You calmed him?"

They lowered their voices as the train rushed into a small station and two other people entered, so Uncle Jim heard no more. From the mere glimpse of the top of Ulf's head he had caught in the theatre, he did not recognise him again, so his Yorkshire caution, and the fact that Kate had never mentioned any particular youth to him, held him quiet. He felt sure that he must be a casual fortune-hunter of no importance to her, or else she would have confided in him, and he chuckled sardonically to himself.

"It's really quite like a melodrama," he thought silently. "Old uncle overhears the villains talking, by a chance in a thousand, and foils them by warning the heroine, all in the good old way! Eh! What an utter ass that young scamp is, though! He little guesses that Kate's real fortune is still in my possession—why, I think the foundry-profits alone would more than buy up most old 'Parks' as they remarked!

I'll go and tell her to-night as soon as I can leave the old boy after dinner."

Arrived in London, he alighted still chuckling, as he watched the pair vanish in the crowd, hailed a taxi-cab, and drove to his own Club; but there he found a wire asking him if possible to run down to Woolwich, where one of his old shipmates was dangerously ill with pneumonia, and craving to see him. So he hastily 'phoned the dinner-host, and rushed off to give his friend what comfort he could.

It was ten o'clock on Wednesday morning when he got back to London, and during that time a calamity was impending.

From Uncle Jim's discovery, it will be seen that under Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke's fascinating personality and charming manners there lurked a particularly low and dangerous brand of coward.

He had next to no mental balance where a pretty face tempted him, and he made ardent "love" and proposed unscrupulously wherever the whim took him to do so; and if his invariably speedy "cooling off" broke the girl's heart, no matter—he always took care that she would be of his own social standing, and so escaped the legal consequences he would otherwise have encountered. He was the oddest combination of cunning and folly in these matters, for he always acted the part of serious lover down to

the smallest details—as witness his conversation as to the future in the Hollands' conservatory; but he never seemed to consider that the part was only temporary, and that he might possibly be called upon to justify his words by some irate male relative. Possibly he trusted to a deterring fear of open scandal to shield him even from this danger, since all the girls he deluded were, as has been said, of his own social position.

Kate—sweet, dainty Kate (and her convenient dower, as he had at first thought), had appealed so strongly to him, that had it not been for his investigations into Colonel Iden's will, he would have married her, and after perhaps a month's pretence of passion—for he was incapable of any longer constancy,—have trifled with such as Llora Colmes-Inch afterwards. But when he believed her income to be sufficient only for her own needs, he suddenly saw her in the light of a scrape to be evaded, and straightway cast about for some pretext for a quarrel.

It seems almost incredible that his whole feelings for her should perish between Monday afternoon and Tuesday night, but they did, and now his one idea was to break off all acquaintance with her! Coward-like, he dreaded the sight of her face if he went to her and announced it—and yet a plausible reason for his conduct was exceedingly hard to find, since she had never crossed him in any way, except the few words over

Llora — which were certainly not sufficient to use.

No! He dared not face her himself, and yet he must go no further with her—and to expose his behaviour to a third person was impossible. He puzzled deeply, as he sat in the study of his father's small town house on his return from Gatwick, and smoked for an hour without result. Then suddenly he had a devilish inspiration, and, seizing a pen and paper, began to draft out a letter. But in the midst, a qualm of fear struck him sharply, for he guessed that his statement was libellous if it were openly taken up by Gertrude on Kate's behalf, and stopped short in a twitter of uncertainty. Cunning scamp as he was in his lies, he lacked the boldness of a really clever villain, to act entirely on his own initiative.

While he reflected, his cousin, Dick Stanley, a nice boy of nineteen, just about to join his regiment in India, came in to say good-bye. He was a clever youth, and, since he was going away, Ulf decided to ask his advice. After a little talk, he said therefore:

"I'm in a silly mess with a girl, and I'm just wondering how to slide out."

"Whew—w! Again!" whistled Dick. "Actress?"

"No. Colonel's daughter, and I met her in a Women's League riot at Albert Hall. She was rather fetching, and I was silly enough to make

love to her, but since, I've found out she's not quite suitable to be Mrs Hume-Bolingbroke."

"Why?"

"Well, it's an awful thing in so young a girl—but she's a drug-fiend!"

"Good Lord! How awful! Then what will you do? You must break off with her at once," said the boy, his nice blue eyes dilating.

"Yes, but then, how? You can't tell a woman a thing like *that* to her face, and I don't fancy writing it. . . . I wish to goodness I'd somebody who'd go to her and say I've changed my mind—er—we aren't suited to each other. Dick . . . you're going to India—you'd never see her again?" he said tentatively.

Just revolt of this method sprang up in Dick promptly. "No! I'm hanged if I'll do dirty work like that for anybody! Besides, she *may* love you, and make a fuss," he said with anger.

"No, it's only a case of mutual disappointment," said Ulf cunningly. "*She* thought I was a wealthy eldest son—*I* thought she was straight and had money of her own—and she hadn't much."

"Ah—I see. . . . But are you sure about the drugs?" asked Dick, suddenly suspicious of his cousin, from past knowledge of his career.

"Yes, quite. And there'll be no fuss. How can any woman expose the fact that she's even suspected of such a thing, to anyone? I've

luckily not introduced her to the family, and we've hardly any mutual friends except Banquor, who was with me when I met her. And he doesn't know I've gone so far to propose. Oh no—she can't kick up,—only, it's very awkward to arrange . . ." said Ulf, gathering courage from Dick's presence.

"Well, write and break it as gently as you can, and I'll post the letter as I go home now—and that's all I will do in the matter. Why *will* you always be getting into these holes, Ulf? It's stupid."

"Life's life! Well, I'll write, and then day after to-morrow I'll go with the mater to the Riviera—lucky she's just off there," answered he, as he wrote the note that was to prove to Kate Iden the worth and reliability of civilised man.

But as Dick walked along Piccadilly, a rather exciting taxi-cab smash made him forget to drop the letter in the post, and it lay in his pocket till next morning.

CHAPTER XVI

DISILLUSION

Next morning, as he was passing the end of Mount Street, Dick Stanley, in feeling for his cigarette case, found in his pocket Ulf's letter. With a dismayed start at his carelessness, he stared at it, and, seeing the address, determined to simply step down the street and drop it in the Idens' letter-box. This impulse served the great god Coincidence in a most unlooked-for manner.

Kate had promised to speak at a Boys' Conference belonging to the Masculine Alliance of the League, and one of the junior male secretaries had arranged to supply her with some details for her speech. He rang up from headquarters to say that he would call on his way to Kensington that morning, if convenient. Kate replied that it was all right, and told the page that she was expecting a young gentleman, and to show him into the morning-room.

This was about half an hour before Dick's discovery of the unposted letter, and thus, as

he came up the Idens' steps, the boy chanced to be polishing the door-handle, and greeted him with "Miss Iden is expecting you, sir—this way, please," and stepped inside.

Dick came hastily after him, pulling the letter from his pocket; its stiff corner stuck in the cloth edge a minute, and before he could give it to the boy, or finish his sentence of "I'm not coming in—er, only please give—er——" Kate chanced to come across the hall, and swept forward to meet him.

"Come in, please—so fortunate I had not gone out already. How cold it is! Shut the door, Toms. Come into the morning-room—Mr —Southwell—is it not?"

Dumb-stricken for an awful moment, Dick lost his head and held the note out to her, as the door clicked behind him, before he could make any excuse as to having got to the wrong number, or anything else. And as he stood there, transfixed and blushing crimson, Kate had opened the letter, and was reading it, saying meanwhile: "Thanks — from Mrs Cawdor, I suppose?"

For another instant Dick was too paralysed to act. Ulf's evil insinuations had led him to believe her to be a flashy, second-rate young woman, whose life was discernible by a glance, and here she was, a dainty, calm-eyed girl of their own world, thoroughbred to the tips of her

small fingers, and whose healthy transparent skin was, in itself, a reply to the abominable lie of " a drug-fiend."

Kate read the last line of that awful letter, and put her hand to her head, as if to make sure she was awake. Not till later did she grasp the full insult of its altered handwriting and incomplete signature—the vile words had burned in too deeply.

" DEAR GIRL,—I feel a brute to write this to you now, but it is better than to allow you to care for me too much. I know that my feeling for you is not so deep as you think it, and there is another reason why I cannot seriously ask you to be my wife. A woman with the habit you showed me during tea on Monday would never settle down into my position. This is a very difficult letter to write, so I hope you will excuse more, and forgive and forget quickly.—Yours, with pain, ULF."

Dick, wishing himself at Jericho, looked desperately round at the shut door, and gasped as he saw her stricken face. Once he had been obliged to tell an aunt that her husband, whom she had adored, was lying dead in the hunting field, and now Kate was exactly like her—ghostly white, and with the same sightless eyes, and moving lips which made no sound.

"Who are you? It's a trick—Ulf never would write that to me!" she panted at last, laying a shaking hand on his sleeve.

"I'm his cousin—I forgot to post the note he wrote—oh, Lord, I do feel a sweep!" jerked Dick wildly.

"Oh, but he couldn't be in earnest. Why, we're engaged—what does he mean about not asking me to marry him? He was going to speak to my stepmother when she came back from Scotland—oh, do explain—it's just like a nightmare—it can't be true!"

Dick saw a room door open before them, and walked into it, she following like someone in a dream. He dreaded anyone else entering the hall, and closed the room door upon them, with a sense of relief. Then he faced her with all the courage he could muster.

"You mustn't take it to heart like this, Miss Iden," he faltered. "Ulf's not worth it; he's a brute, and he lied to me about you till I listened to him when he was writing to you. As I was going to my rooms, I took the letter to post, and forgot it till this morning. Try and forget him."

Her stunned reason rallied itself again.

"But he loves me—he must have been mad to write this—if he did write it. No sane man could treat me as he has done, and then write like that. Ask Lord Banquor—he knows how matters were between us. And, oh—do tell me

what he means by 'a woman of that habit.' What habit ?"

"Well, I'd better tell you the truth, even if he's a liar. He said you took drugs!" replied Dick bravely.

"Oh! My God!" gasped Kate, as the enormity of the accusation rushed upon her. "Why, I had a headache and ate a tabloid the doctor gave me. It's true it had morphine and belladonna in it, but I've only had one box in my whole life—not twelve doses—here's the rest of them."

She snatched a little cardboard box from the bureau, and showed him several tabloids remaining.

"Why, you can ask anyone who knows me well if I'm guilty—it's too silly for words! Could my brain carry all the figures it does for the League work ? Could I paint, and do that fine embroidery, if my hands were unsteady and my memory a blank, like people's who take drugs ?"

She indicated an exquisite framed needlework picture on the wall.

Then, as the cruelty of it struck deeper, she sank on the sofa and hid her face.

"Oh—it can only be his excuse—because he has tired of me!" she said, very low.

Breathing shortly, Dick sat down, instinctively with his back towards her, feeling he had no

right to stare at her agony. It was, indeed, more cruel than death—to be cast out like a dog is the very worst pain that a woman can bear.

Dick realised then that Ulf's blackest lie of all was when he had said Kate was designing upon his position, for she had loved him with the purest, most selfless love that any girl can give.

His wrath blazed hot against his cowardly cousin—to treat such a girl, refined and sensitive to the highest degree, like some mere hussy not fit to trust with even his full signature, was enough to have killed her with humiliation. It was the more tragic because there was nothing to be said—no possible redemption of the situation ; and he dared not leave her while she lay in that dreadful silence, for fear she should collapse as his aunt had done.

"Miss Iden, don't give way like this—he's an infernal scoundrel, and he's done it before to other girls, but not so badly—I'd no idea he could be such a scamp as this—and he wears the King's uniform too. It won't bear thinking about—I'll go to him, and he must apologise at once."

He rose, seething with rage, but she caught at his hand quickly.

"No—you mean it well, but—after this, I'd rather not have even an apology from such a cur ! And I would have given him my life if

he'd asked it! His eyes were so honest too—I trusted him——"

"Please don't blame yourself a bit," said Dick kindly. "He's most fascinating, the brute—I know him! He can make a woman see black as white when he likes."

She lay on the cushions, limp and still, till Dick prayed she would cry. Anything was better than this frozen grief.

"Shall I take him any message?—you'll feel better alone now," he asked.

"Only this: say that I did not know such a coward existed, and that the lowest bully that loves a coster girl has at least the manliness to break it off with her personally. I'm sorry his lies about me have put you in this awkward position, but I quite excuse your part in it, now you've explained. If you could see Lord Banquor you could tell him that we no longer have Mr Hume-Bolingbroke as an acquaintance—he will understand, and it will save me having to write to him, as probably Ulf has told him some lies also."

"I will tell him the true version. He will cut Ulf dead, if I know him at all. *He* plays cricket, anyhow," said Dick valiantly. "I'd like to shoot Ulf myself."

Kate laughed, a quick, hard little laugh.

"No—that's just where his brutality lies. He knew he ran no risk—had done nothing legally

wrong, and I had no brother or father handy to demand any redress. People would jeer at *me* for believing him. But, if he had struck me with a knife, it would not have hurt half so——"

She hid her eyes again, and then as suddenly looked up and gave him her hand, without rising.

"You needn't be afraid to leave me now—I shan't faint, and—thank you ever so much for your sympathy."

Dick bent down and took her fingers very gently.

"I've never felt such a fool in my life for listening a second to that blackguard. I shall speak to him once—and never again. Here's my card, so that if you recall anything else you want me to do for you, you can send me word —to the Junior Soldiers' and Sailors' Club, till Friday, when I sail for India. Good-bye, then, Miss Iden—please don't fret——"

He went slowly out, and took it upon himself to say to the genuine Masculine Secretary, whom he met upon the front door mat, that Miss Iden was suddenly ill, and could not see anyone till to-morrow.

CHAPTER XVII

AWAKENING

HAD Kate's dealings with Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke been related to her six months earlier as the story of another girl, she would have unhaltingly condemned her as a weak, unseeing fool. Her whole character seemed to forbid that she should fall quickly and violently in love with a wavering, frivolous boy of his type, but by the law of the unexpected it happened, and she herself could never explain it afterwards.

Curiously, her previous experience of men's changeableness had been no warning, and she had trusted him absolutely; but doubtless this was due to her own utter sincerity in everything, and her loyalty to anyone she loved.

Such deliberate, callous cruelty as his she never imagined, since her own sense of justice and mercy to a weaker thing was almost fanatically exact. And since she herself never shrank from anything she believed to be her duty (as witness her conscientious letter to Ian), her disgust at

Ulf's cowardice in not settling matters himself was ten times deeper.

In the hour after Dick left her, she tasted of the very bitterest fruit of humiliation, in the knowledge that she had been wantonly used as a mere toy; but bad as this was, a worse pain succeeded, as she realised that she had lost in him all her hopes and dreams—that never again would she feel his kiss or know the joy of his strong young arms round her—see the smile in his gay blue eyes. . . .

She knew the road women travel to madness as she walked up and down, her tears streaming, her loosened hair hanging about her shoulders, and her throat tense till she felt to have screamed insanely would have been a relief—when the door opened to admit Uncle Jim!

One glance at her set him guessing what had occurred.

"Kitty, lass—what's the matter?" he cried, striding towards her.

Wild as she was, her habit of concise phrases stuck to her.

"Oh, uncle—I thought I'd met the Right Man, and I loved him—and he's a brute. He's sent me from him like a dog," she threw out curtly. "I'd better tell you all about him—he was called Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke, and he——" and she went through the whole miserable story with almost telegraphic brevity. But as she ended he

caught her in his arms, and then sat down and drew her upon his knee like a child.

"Why, darling, I was just now coming to tell you what I've found out about him. He's a blackguard beyond words, and you mustn't shed another tear over him. It wasn't your fault, for *you* yourself didn't count either way with him — he was only after your money, dear! Listen!"

He repeated exactly what he had heard pass between Ulf and the steward, and every word felt to quench her fiery pangs like heavy rain, as she grasped Ulf's true reasons for forsaking her; and as the facts sank in, fierce anger began to rise from pain's ashes.

"It's the humiliation of it that's the worst, uncle—to feel he dared play with me!" she cried, as he ended. "But oh, it's such a relief to know it wasn't any fault of my own——"

Uncle Jim's mouth set in a straight line.

"Yes, that's the worst part of it—that you can do nothing active, darling," he said meditatively. "To tell anyone would injure you more than him. If I thrash him it will make such a stir—and then, God knows, what further lies would spread about you. He knew—the damned scoundrel—that with people like us he risked no open scandal. But there are other ways of paying such rascals—only they take time to carry out. Leave it to me, Kitty, and then just

when he thinks he's safe and swimming along in the world——! ! ! ! "

She smiled wanly as she looked into his resolute face.

The average South Englander's estimate of the Yorkshire character is usually that of a bluff, hot-tempered, gamely-fighting individual, and so far it is correct, but omits one important trait which must always be reckoned with. The true Yorkshireman allows no one to wrong him unavenged.

He is steadier, cooler than the Corsican, shares his love of retribution, surpassing him in his bull-dog tenacity in its pursuit. Ten—twenty years may elapse, but he will track and corner his foe at last with the same infinite skill he displays in a horse-deal. And if, like Uncle Jim, he hails from the moorland districts, where men brood long, he is more to be feared. Had Ulf Hume-Bolingbroke guessed at the pit of humiliation that would be dug for him in the future, he would certainly have much preferred to shoot himself on the spot. Kate sat silent a little space, and then, as if the familiar action helped her to rally her reasoning powers, pinned up her hair, and Uncle Jim carefully picked up the pins she scattered in her excitement and gave them to her.

"You know, he seemed so 'straight,' uncle," she said presently. "I never had the smallest doubts of him, until the crash came. And you

know, too, how sceptical I've been of all men—the only other man I ever met who approached him for seeming honesty was one I met in Burma, . . . and I quarrelled with him because he didn't understand me . . . he had primitive ideas of women. . . . But I do wish you had come to warn me before Mr Stanley came with the letter—Why ? . . ."

"So I should have done, love ; only, you see, when I got to the Club last night there was a wire from poor old Captain Scales to ask me to go to Woolwich, as he was awfully ill and I went and sat up with him all night—he was a bit easier when I left him after breakfast to come here, but I said I'd go back as soon as I could. Pneumonia."

"Oh, I am sorry—then you'd better go now," cried Kate, her instinct to help anyone in trouble rising over her own longing for him to stay with her.

"Well, I'll come back as soon as I can leave him again, Kitty—and meanwhile don't worry any more than you can help ; if you've got a sleeping powder, take it and rest for a few hours—you'll feel better when you wake."

He kissed her and went out as quickly as he had come, but Kate only sighed at his masculine delusion that anyone as tempest-tossed as she could calmly "lie down" and sleep in mid-day—as silly a notion as that when a woman loses

appetite she must be physically ailing, and that to go on eating will cure headache. On the contrary, she was longing for some quick action, and ran up to her room, threw herself full-length on the hearth-rug, and thought—thought—thought. . . .

She called up all the calm reasoning powers, all the level judgments of men's characters that were hers before she fell under Ulf's spell, weighed him over in the finest scales, and found him false as any deceiver of whom she had read in fiction. She knew then that a gilded scamp of to-day is one of the worst creatures that hoary London has ever seen—worse, even, than the rakes of Stuart times, since they, at least, had a certain code of "honour," a bond which made a duel a possible satisfaction for outraged relations, while the only law of the modern scoundrel is "Thou shalt not be found out."

She was sick to her soul with grief, yet she was brave enough to be thankful at her escape from what must have been a life's misery had he continued his mock "love" to a marriage, and afterwards revealed himself.

Her heart's horizon was clearing now from black despair, but the grey mists of disillusion still hung heavily above.

Then chance brought about a great issue.

The little housemaid had, in dusting, picked up a tinted photograph of Ian which had slipped

behind a chest of drawers some days ago, and Kate, her mind full of Ulf, had never thought to lay it aside. And now it faced her with Ian's straight, dark blue eyes and resolute mouth, and she stared steadily back, comparing the two as never before.

Ian's mind to her had been always as open as daylight ; with Ulf's she was always finding shut doors—evasive replies, crafty little subterfuges, which her love for him had overlooked then, but which she now saw plainly.

She pushed back the wavy hair from her hot forehead, and the little jade god on her bangle touched it, icy cold. It must go back to him. Not finding her jewel pliers to open its ring in their case, she sought in a drawer, pulled out a confused mass of ribbons, chiffons, and letters, and topmost of these lay one from Ian,—dated about three months ago. On impulse, she opened and read it very slowly.

"My dearest Kate,—I can never put how much I long for you into words, so I hope you'll guess without, and make up your mind soon, darling. You are never out of my thoughts a minute—even when I'm seeing the men make the elephants drag the logs, or am hanging about potting wild peacock. Really, beloved, I wish I'd made you answer me plainly in Rangoon. I hate the thought that your stepmother doesn't know

yet that I want you. General Iden must have guessed at the time, but I wish we'd told him."

She picked up the next page and gave a start, for she never remembered reading it at all—could it have stuck in the thick envelope and been quite overlooked until now? The letter was written as jungle men's letters often must be, upon loose sheets, torn from a notebook, and as this one's were sentences complete in themselves, she had never missed it on first reading the rest, particularly as Ian didn't number his pages.

"I've saved quite a lot this quarter and have now 5000 rupees in the bank; but it's so little when I think of you. Oh, my dear, how I hate your money, for if you'd been the usual poor officer's daughter I'd have carried you off just willy-nilly as my rieving old ancestors would have done, and kept you till you did admit you loved me. We'd have been equals then, but now I feel the money like a wall between us—over which I mustn't grab you. It is this that makes me have patience to wait till you know for certain that it is only yourself I want. Of course, what I pray for is, that we may find oil or rubies on our land. It's a mad prayer, but anything's possible in this marvellous country. I know a fellow who made £100,000 out of one well in five years. And if I do, darling, I shan't ask you again to

marry me! *You'll* have to ask *me*. Or I shall kidnap you quietly one night and feel it's my due! No more hang-back for me then—but so long as I have nothing I must dare nothing."

Then the next page continued upon casual things—she remembered it well.

She sat still as an alabaster Buddha for a weighty space, watching dawn-light flicker through the clouds of doubt and deception which had blinded her so long. In that overlooked page she found the truth to which she had so persistently shut her eyes before—that Ian loved her only for herself. Even the rest of the letter, read formerly so sceptically, had another meaning now.

She felt like a miner who has wilfully delved in barren soil, while all the time a rich treasure lay unheeded, uncredited close to her misguided pick.

It is given to few women to grasp the truth so quickly as Kate Iden did, and she acted upon it with the deliberate promptness that she had owned in all things, save her one folly with Ulf.

Taking all Ian's letters from their silken bag, she read them through, and as she did, her highest thoughts thrilled. Every phrase showed his clean, sane outlook on life, and the most salient fact of all was his steady love for her. His tolerance of her whims, his uncomplaining

endurance of the forest hardships, his utter unselfishness in countless ways, came back to her with a reproaching rush—she knew that she had tormented him beyond forbearance, not realising what such love meant till now.

She shuddered as she remembered her own carelessly wounding letters, and guessed the pain he had borne so bravely. His views might be primitive upon many subjects, but he had a very definite idea of honour and a most scrupulous adherence to its every law. He had made few flattering, pretty speeches (as Ulf had done), but his constant unobtrusive little kindnesses had been worth a thousand fair words.

Now, as she looked, she saw him clearly—single-hearted, brave in mind and body—and she, blind idiot—she called herself a hundred times—had driven him from her and embraced mere artificial civilisation, so-called pleasure, and social vanities of the West—and her reward had been the lying caresses of Ulf !

Sudden hatred of the whole false world of London seized her in a strong grasp. She looked at the very furniture of her room and hated its air of smart antiquity—hated even the heap of invitations on her table as breathing of her life in the whirl.

What was London but one vast market where men and women sold or exchanged themselves for money or position ? A place where under

grey skies people fought, clawed and pushed each other down into the mud, actual and moral, to gain their peddling little ends.

A quick picture rose of golden Burma where the sun shone, and silken-robed folk gave each other rice and water in the name of Greater Need ungrudgingly—of where Life and Death were too near neighbours to allow of wasting time on pettiness of word or deed, and where the white man felt the ties of race-brotherhood bind him to act kindly to other Europeans when they fell into trouble. She saw again the forest's wonderful green aisles and sunshot clearings, heard the faint silvery temple bells in the sunset-wind across the lakes on whose warm waves Ian rowed her in a boat.

She looked out, and rain was falling on the grey street's muddy flags, and a wretched woman with a tray of sodden flowers being moved on by a policeman! Then a hearse passed slowly, its polished black wood and shiny steamy windows followed by more dripping landaus and tearful people in crape. . . .

It cast the die, as no other sight could have done. She knelt by the window, her breath catching sharply, a great resolve tipping in her heart's trembling scales.

An Irish sage's verse that Ian had once read to her rang in her ears.

"So the maid threw away the Gold Heart of

Black King Diarmid, and then deep woe came, and she sought it beyond the earth's end in vain."

Had she too thrown away the Gold Heart ?

No ! No ! It was not too late, for Ian was still alive, thank God ! She would write him at once and tell him . . . but then . . . she could not possibly make him understand on paper what had happened with regard to Ulf !

And he was in Burma . . . and she was here. . . .

Then a daring idea struck her—so daring that she gasped at herself as it formed. She would go to Ian now !

The hint of life's uncertainty sent by the hearse spurred her on. If she dallied, accident or fever might take either of them, and then she would, indeed, have lost her all.

She knelt on and prayed as never before for light to act wisely, and then sank back, her head on a chair, and lay silent for a long half-hour, forging her plans. Then like an opening door, she saw how she could go.

Aunt Nora's ship would reach Marseilles on Friday, and to-day was Wednesday. Therefore she could get the eleven express from Victoria to-morrow, and as Aunt Nora always reserved a two-berth cabin for herself she would have no difficulty as to her passage. . . . Kate laughed as she thought of her amazement when she should step on board and announce her errand. It seemed

planned out for her—yes, she would not even wire Ian, but just go to Rangoon—General Iden would be easily persuaded to take them up to Panshwe, and give him the loveliest surprise.

But then there was . . . Gertrude. . . . Even if Kate wired her now to Scotland there would not be time enough for her to reach London; and even had she had a day longer, she would never have been ready, since the army of trunks without which she never left England on any tour whatever were all unpacked. No, it would take Gertrude a clear month to start on such a trip as Burma. Besides, there was always the awful possibility of her disliking Ian, when she knew how matters stood. . . . Kate trembled as she thought of it, since their affection for each other was so strong; but she reflected that the contrary might occur if only Gertrude could meet Ian and know him well. But still, if she were to follow Kate by the next ship, she would arrive in Rangoon, stay with her sister-in-law, and then Ian would come and charm her opposition all away. She would feel bound to hurry up and follow Kate if she now sailed with Aunt Nora, but the girl felt sure that if she waited and tried to persuade her to go later they would never get off; and as there was only one thing now dominant in her mind—that she must get to Ian without delay—Kate determined to go!

She propped her nervousness at the leap by

the idea that since she was going with Aunt Nora it was not like going alone—and besides, she would have three weeks' voyage to reflect in, as to . . . the rest. But she laughed at her own prudence. "If I think for a year I'm sure it will be the same. Ian is my own man, and I must go to him."

She sprang up smartly as a soldier at the word, and tied up the little jade god, and addressed it to Dick with a line asking him to give it to Ulf.

"If I had read it in a novel I should have laughed at it as impossible," she mused. "That in one short terrible day I should lose Ulf—whom I thought I loved—and in the same twelve hours find my own soul again, and go to my own true man—it seems madness; but it's life—real life—and the sun seems to shine again for me—I could never have believed it this morning——"

The swift action of packing cleared her head as nothing else could have done—she was as rapid and sure in movement and calculation as if she had been arranging it all for a month.

She blessed her methodical habit of keeping her various travelling necessities all together in certain drawers so as to be easily laid in her trunks, now, and rejoiced because she had so many pretty summer gowns this year,—it was not going to be such an awkward scramble to get away as it had seemed.

It was only three o'clock still, and, totally

oblivious of the fact she had not lunched, she went down and telephoned for a district messenger to do some shopping, and rang up Cook's to reserve her train-seat, and, after writing a wire to Aunt Nora on the ship, was just going to put on her things and rush out into Bond Street to buy an indispensable hat, when she halted with a shock. Uncle Jim! What would he say to this sudden flight? Well, anyhow, he *must* know of it, and surely he would see her action in her light, when she had explained it to him. But she could not find Captain Scales' number in the telephone book, and did not know the name of his house. So she wrote thus—

"DEAREST UNCLE,—I am going out to Burma with Aunt Nora to-morrow to see the Real Right Man, so will you come round to me at once when you get this, like a dear? I'm not mad—I'll explain everything then. My train leaves Victoria at eleven"—

and sent it by messenger boy to the Club.

Then for an hour she shopped hard, came in, and buried herself in her trunks until dinner-time, after which she set upon her stiffest task—writing an explanatory letter to Gertrude. It was nine by the time she had finished it, but when, after many attempts, she enveloped it, she felt that, come what might, she had done her best.

She then rang up Uncle Jim's Club, but they replied he had been in, taken her note and gone out again, so she fell to writing to the League secretaries, saying she was obliged to go abroad for some months; but by midnight she was uneasy, for still he did not come.

She packed on frantically, and when at two o'clock she dropped on her bed, she was too utterly exhausted to worry about anything more.

But when in the morning she had breakfasted and eight and nine had struck, she was very anxious, and to her inquiries the Club porter said that Captain Siward had left word he would be at Victoria, so, feeling calmer, she made her final preparations. She told the servants, to satisfy their curiosity, she was going out with her aunt for three months, and she had no one else she wished to see before leaving.

But her feelings were akin to a sleep-walker's as she watched her luggage being piled on a four-wheeler.

"It's real," she said to herself. "I *am* awake," with conviction, "and I'm going right away from this horrid civilised fraud of a city—away to the honest primitive forests, to my own true, Primitive Man—and I'll make him approve of the League too," she added happily.

When the cab drew up at the platform, she jumped into Uncle Jim's arms, asking "Why didn't you come last night?" and then stared,

for he wore his travelling tweeds. They never wasted words with each other.

"My dear Kitty," said he, pointing to a pile of boxes, "you didn't think I was going to let my girl elope without me? I left poor Scales much better, and got your note when I landed at the Club, but it took me all night to pack up. Come, get into the train—you can tell me all about the wonderful Real Right Man as we go along, for I'm coming out to inspect him, you know. No more hanky-pankies this time!"

Between tears of relief and laughter, Kate kissed him again.

"Oh, uncle dear, you're the very, *only* wedding present I wanted!" she cried as they steamed away.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISENCHANTMENT

IAN lay smoking in a long folding-chair at the door of a quaint little jungle hut, like some giant beehive roofed with broad green and brown plantain leaves and yellow bamboo lathes, in the centre of his forest camp, in the heart of the wilds beyond Panshwe tract. It formed a better shield from the sun than his usual camping tent, which, however, stood opposite, for use by night, but since he had known that his forest honeymoon would last at least a fortnight on the one place, he had allowed the Kachins to erect the hut.

Before the hut door chattered merrily over the stones a forest stream, running to join the distant river by Panshwe. On the other three sides of the small clearing a strong stockade of sharpened bamboo stakes and cacti leaves had been made, by the sharp dahs of the funny little men of the woods, who wear the curious garb of baggy black cotton-stuff trousers, and

in whose ears gleam, through oddly cut shocks of hair, heavy silver ear-tubes that distend the lobes to uncouth size. One or two of them were in the coolies' enclosure now, swinging curious pots over small fires, well to the right of the thakin's own space. A little behind it was the tent for the elephant men, who now, in the heat of day, were playing fantan undisturbed with two Chinamen, who had passed on their way to the town.

Ian's ponies and mules and the syces were stationed to the left of his tent, far enough away to be from his hearing, yet not too near the protecting fence from the jungle beasts, and near them the tent for Than Dine and the other lugale spread its shade.

It was a most picturesque and interesting scene in that wild frame of the densest jungle, which, across the stream, threw deep shade among the golden blaze of the sunshine. Constant little touches of life relieved the stillness, such as when Than Dine, in his bright yellow-checked pasoh, lounged across the open space, clicking to Ian's little terrier, or one of the white cart-bullocks restlessly tingled its bell and moved round its stake; occasionally a jungle peacock flew to drink in the crystal water, like some lovely enamel against the wood's green. But, for all the beauty, there was a certain little line across Ian's forehead as he gazed around.

Ma Twai rose from where she had been sitting at his feet, on the raised floor of the hut, covered with its vividly dyed linen cloth, and slipped away from sight, behind the tent.

They had been ten days in the Eden of the jungle, ten warm, idle, dream-drugged days of satisfaction and honeyed silences, and Ma Twai was supremely content. Yet towards the end of the time she began to long for the daily stir and movement of the village, for there was no one but Ian, the coolies, and Than, to admire her new tamein and her bracelets. She had a little bag of rupees too, but could not spend them.

At first Ian's delight in her was unclouded, and he would sit for hours gazing at her pretty poses, her carelessly graceful gestures of languor and happy idleness; but now and again, there came times when he wished, ever so slightly, that she would speak of something else rather than finery and the gossip of some of her friends, or that her stock of loving phrases had some variation. She was the most attentive companion he could have had, and she guessed his every thirst, his every need, almost before he knew it himself, until he seemed always to be thanking her for some small service given—and, with the curious illogicalness of man, he rebelled inwardly against accepting it.

The night before they had sat silent for a long, long space, because they had literally

nothing to say, and at last Ian asked her for a story, knowing that Burmese girls know many of the wonderful old legends of the national pwe-themes. But she responded with a very ordinary tale of a princess, a prince, and an unwilling paternal king, many dangers, and a wedding at the end—and Ian found himself yawning as she told it.

Just now the same thing had happened, and as she vanished a sense of calm quiet stole over him, and he almost dozed off in his long canvas chair.

Suddenly a shrill sound broke his nap—a sharp yelp, which deepened to a long howling of wild pain; it came from behind his tent, with ever-increasing insistence, as he rose hurriedly and ran round the corner. Then he stopped short in horrified amazement.

There stood the brown cook, clad only in his pasoh, his skin shiny with heat under that ardent sun, holding by the collar Ian's Great Dane, Socrates, crouching and howling impotently, his head encased in his wire muzzle . . . and showering blows upon him, with Ian's long, plaited hide whip, her small face tense with rage, was Ma Twai!

Blood was dripping from long scratches on the dog's flanks, and with a gasp of horror Ian saw that she had stuck into the whip's plaiting several long thorns!

"You evil dog! What are you doing?" thundered Ian to the cook.

"The thakinma bid me hold the dog—thakin!" whined the man, loosing poor Socrates, who ran straight to his master and thrust his head straight into his hand.

"You horrid, cruel little thing!" flashed Ian at her. "How dare you touch my dog? What had he done to you?"

She pouted, and looked quite injured.

"He has overturned my silks into a heap, and then knocked over the lamp in the tent, and they are swimming with oil—all spoiled. I beat him to teach him to go no more therein," she said. "You often beat him, yourself, for chasing chickens."

"Yes, but I do it gently with a small stick, or my open hand," he replied, anxiously examining the dog's wounds. "Here, Than Dine, get water, and bathe Socrates, quickly!"

He felt quite silenced as he looked with disgust at her. Of what use to reprove her when she did not see her fault?

When she was busy again at a bit of embroidery on the end of a scarf, he sat down reading a novel with a paper back and a lurid murder inside, and felt ruffled beyond reason.

Presently she went out again, towards their night-tent, to get some more silk from her box, when suddenly she stopped dead in her steps

—a big cobra was rearing its head at her, and in her fright she tripped over the tent rope and lay helpless, close to it, for a horrid moment.

Than Dine, coming across with Ian's leggings he had been mending, saw, and, with a quickness beyond expectation, acted. He had no long dah handy, not even a stick, only a short Kachin dagger, about table-knife length, in his pasoh fold. But he dared not wait to fetch anything else, even though he knew he risked death if his blow missed and the snake turned its head too quickly. But the boy never hesitated. Just as Ian raised his head from his book, he leaned forward boldly, and the short blade rose in the air. With a smart, strong stroke, the snake's body parted clean asunder, the hood and head falling harmlessly on the beaten earth close by Ma Twai's little kicking, sandalled foot.

"Hurrah! Bravo, Than Dine!" broke from Ian's tense lips, as he rushed forward to pick up his shaking wife. He had had no time to move, the whole thing having passed in much less space than it is written.

"Than Dine, you deserve ten rupees for that! I never saw you move as quickly before—wish you waited at table so," he cried, in his relief.

"I was much afraid, thakin, but you would have been angry if it had bitten her," said the yellow boy simply, and grinning with glee. "I shall be so glad to have the rupees!"

"You shall, next pay-day," said Ian, and carried Ma Twai to the hut to get her a drink of water.

She recovered in a few minutes from her scare, and then demanded quite tartly:

"Why did you reward Than Dine so well? He gets a big wage as it is. He would never have thought of being paid for killing the snake. It is a waste of silver."

Ian looked at her speechlessly. She did not consider the risk the boy had run, nor the great peril from which he had saved her—only the money.

"I could have bought a set of jacket buttons for ten rupees, on the cargo-flat," she mused aloud, regretfully. "Ah! the fine things they have in the shops in Mandalay—and they say that those of Rangoon are finer. I wish I could see Rangoon."

The idea once in her head stayed there. She thought about the city of which she had heard so much, and with every hour its charms impressed her more. She looked at a set of pictures of some new buildings there, in a back number of an illustrated paper, and longed to see them, and all the other wonders of a big town. Had Ian not told her, too, that white people often had long marriage journeys? And this would be such a fine one—no other girl she knew had been taken to Rangoon by her thakin.

"Beloved, I would like to go to Rangoon," she said soon. "Could we not go there for a while before we return to Mingaing? Donalbain thakin will be up again from Mandalay by next week, and you could very well leave this jungle to him—the fellers have nearly done the tract now. I should enjoy it all so much. Do take me, Ian, my heart!"

"It costs too much money, dearest. Later in the season we will go to Mandalay, if you like," he answered, with a quick aversion to mixing with civilisation again, now. "Rangoon is very hot and sticky—not nice at all."

"But I want to go," she said, her mouth drooping like a disappointed child's. "Everybody knows Mandalay, and so few have seen Rangoon, and we could go so well on the boat, and then I should ride again in a train. I once did, between Kanhla and Soban, and it was beautiful. Take me—do!"

She chattered of nothing else until bedtime, and he felt inclined to tell her it was impossible, sternly, he got so tired of her persistence, but finally sought refuge in going out to see one of the ponies which had a cough, and when he came back, she lay asleep on her razai, a lovely smile of child-like innocence on her parted lips.

He blamed himself a little for his harsher thoughts of her that day, yet still, to take her to Rangoon seemed an ordeal beyond his will.

Everything would jar upon his thoughts—his memories of Kate's presence there, his inevitable meetings with people who had known her, and the half-averted side-glances men would give Ma Twai.

He resolved not to go, but to take her to Mandalay as soon as Donalbain came back, and, so thinking, lay down and was soon asleep.

But he did not reckon on Ma Twai's rain-like persistence in wearing away the rocks of his decision. She was quite sad and silent when he told her over chota hazri that they should not go, and she did not croon songs to herself as she thanaka'd her face, as usual.

By evening she had the air of resignation, and hardly smiled at all when he kissed her on his return from his day's overseeing the men, some distance away. She talked less than customary, and the next day she hardly spoke at all and had no interest in anything.

He was worried, and tried to cheer her up, and got uneasy lest she should be sickening for some illness, and asked her what she would like—if they should go back to Mingaing so that her mother could attend to her ; she declined, with the smile of a patient martyr, and silently worked at her silks. To cut a long tale short, in three days Ian's resolution had melted and he had promised to take her to Rangoon at once, provided Donalbain returned in the next few days,

and he sent a note into Panshwe to reserve their cabin on the steamer down the river for the next trip.

Then they struck the tents, and one golden afternoon reached Panshwe, to get the evening's rest after their jungle march before the boat went on in the morning, since it is river custom to tie up by the bank at dusk, for the cargo-boat.

To Ian's slight dismay, the Babu in the Flotilla Company's employ told him that Donalbain thakin had not yet come up from Mandalay. But very late, Than Dine, who had gone across to Mingaing from the camp to bring Ian's travelling kit from the bungalow, brought a wire which a runner had left that morning, saying that Donalbain would come by the mail boat the next day but one, having missed the cargo by his baggage being detained between Mandalay town and shore.

So, with a shoulder shrug, Ian felt he could start.

The captain on the cargo-boat was an old friend of his, and when they boarded her he received them very kindly, giving Ma Twai a cabin with two mirrors, so that she was late for dinner, having amused herself so much while she changed her dress.

As it happened, there were no other men Ian knew on board, only a party of eight cheerful, questionful, globe-trotting Americans, who re-

velled in Ma Twai when she appeared and sat shyly down on the chair next to him at dinner. He had shown her how to use a knife and fork European way, long ago, and this they found charming.

In fact, they were so jolly and easy to get on with, that Ian laughed and talked with a more interested air than he had worn for some days, particularly with the daughter, a natty girl of eighteen, with a soft flaxen pompadour of hair, an impertinent nose, and a smart tongue, which wagged off sparkling sayings by the hour.

"You're a queer, slow lot, you English," she said with droll cheek, "but when you *do* hit back, it gets there. When Poppa was in Southampton once, he got kind of stuck on some photographer's wares, and went and was snapped. When he called for the proofs, they were all right but the mouth, so he said to the operator, 'Say, now, why did you make my mouth all open wide like that?' and the man, a dandy at his work, you see, didn't like it, and he looked Poppa down like a Trust King and answered, 'Well, sir, you can't expect me ever to shut an American's mouth!' and Pop was so tickled he didn't mind his impudence."

They all talked to Ma Twai with that curious inconsistency which makes Americans, who are at home so prejudiced upon the colour question, toy amiably with Japanese maids and Arab

donkey boys when abroad, and she answered them in the slow, broken English she was learning from Ian, delighting them with her quaint mistakes. But as she watched him talking to the daughter, she frowned, and very soon said she was tired and sought her cabin. When, half an hour later, he followed, still chuckling over a tale of the old father's, the laugh died on his lips, for she sat on the bunk frowning like a thunder-cloud.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked wonderingly.

"Oh yes—you can laugh and be merry with other women!" she fired at him with scorn. "It is only with me you yawn! What horrid hair she had—just like butter!"

"Why, Ma Twai, I meant nothing—I only talked to those people for politeness. It is usual with us to do so."

"So! Yes—and to look into girls' eyes as you did into hers? I saw her answer your look."

Perhaps the American girl, who admired Ian's finely cut features and well-poised head, had looked at him a trifle warmly, but though he had smiled back at her it was merely the momentary interest of her words which had drawn him to do so, and he was aghast at Ma Twai's insinuation. He sat down by her and playfully tried to smooth out the frown with a caressing hand, but dismay

gave him a sharp twinge. This was yet another bruising mental barrier which fenced him from her Eastern mind and reminded him of their different race. Then he looked at her ripe, red mouth, and tried to banish his pricking thoughts. After all, he could try to teach her the folly of her jealousies and gradually beat down her bad traits, like the cruelty and greed she had shown in camp.

But even though he believed this possible, he was a very long time before he could fall asleep that night, as the river's fast waters rushed past the ship's side,—waters which would bear them on the morrow to Rangoon and bring them in touch with the West again.

CHAPTER XIX

REVELATION

THE Flotilla boatmen were just casting her ropes round mooring posts on the broad quay at Rangoon when Ma Twai Glay came up on deck proudly holding her new travelling bag which Ian had bought her in Mandalay, and looked round for her husband.

He was leaning on the rail idly watching the busy wharf.

Whether a traveller lands from up river or from the sea, Rangoon shows him a fascination all her own,—a sort of mingling of Far-South and mystic East—a hot throb of being, like some fierce opulent beauty flaunting her tanned ruddiness to dazzle all comers.

For a moment Ma Twai seemed to Ian to be entirely in harmony with this impression, as with eyes and cheeks warmly aglow she leaned over the rail to watch the coolies come and take off her belongings to the waiting gharry. This quaint conveyance is like nothing so much as a

matchbox made of yellow venetian blinds, stuck together with wholly inadequate gum ; harnessed thereto mostly by bits of rope is a cream-coloured pony, three sizes too small for it, but which will maintain a steady gallop so long as the matchbox does not tip over, or the bottom fall out—both quite common occurrences.

But just as they were stepping into the vehicle, a young man in white came up and held out his hand to Ian.

"Hullo, M'Rosse! Well, I *am* relieved to see you alive again, old man! Made sure you were a goner, by the awful reports fellows have spread about your tigress-fight, down country! May I come on with you in your gharry? Ah!——"

Peering in he had spied Ma Twai seated proudly in its dusk. He flushed and looked at Ian.

"I think I'll walk after all—mustn't intrude. But will you meet me about six at the Club to-night? I want to talk some business—So long!"

He raised his topi politely to Ma Twai, and went off, leaving Ian with a feeling of intense irritation although he had been perfectly courteous. The mere fact that he had made no other comments was disagreeable.

With another pin-prick Ian remembered that he could not take Ma Twai to the Club, yet as the gharry drove away, she slipped a little hand into

his with an affectionate squeeze, soothing for the moment.

They drove along the wharves and along Strand Road with its straggling stream of people and green and white houses and sparse trees, towards the Grand Hotel, which, since it received worthy Parsee dames, made no objections to an occasional Burmese guest—under proper escort.

Yet as the gharry lurched round a bullock waggon, Ma Twai gave a violent start, and shrank back in her corner, a queer pallor over the deep cream and rose of her face.

A youth in the uniform of the Burma Police, with a sergeant's stripes, was staring at her as if petrified, and as the gharry drew up at the hotel steps, he recovered himself and moved nearer to make sure he saw aright.

Ma Twai's very lips were stiff with fear, but Ian noted nothing, and, alighting quickly, entered the hotel to secure a room, for which he had forgotten to wire ahead.

As he vanished, the dreaded khaki turban came up to Ma Twai, who inwardly thanked the good nats that Than Dine had stayed at the wharf to see their heavier boxes were brought along.

"Ma Twai, flower of my heart, is it indeed you?" whispered the young policeman in a thrilling accent.

"Yes—but I had reasons for seeming dead to

you—I cannot explain here," she answered, trembling.

A terrible look shot into his fierce brown eyes.

"So you have replaced me?" he said sternly. "Very well—but I had not divorced you!"

"Oh, for the Great Hope's sake, do nothing foolish!" she faltered. "If you will only leave me now, I will make all clear to you. See! About sky-shut to-night I will meet you by that shop at the corner, and then you must pretend to be directing me somewhere—but go quickly now!"

He reflected a second, and then, curiosity gaining the day, he nodded and walked away, and Ma Twai walked swiftly up the steps. In the hall Ian was telling the house-boys to see the bags taken upstairs.

At the landing corner they met the wife of a major in the white regiment stationed in Rangoon. Ian had called upon her when last down-country, and she smiled and half extended her hand, but the next instant she saw Ma Twai and transformed her intended halt into a polite passing-on bow and mere "Good morning, Mr M'Rosse," as she descended the stairs.

Ruffled and hot, Ian entered the bedroom, and doffed his topi, and saw the servants deposit their things. No sooner were they alone than Ma Twai, like a child in a new playroom, sat on all the chairs in turn, opened every cupboard,

moving about till it fidgeted Ian only to watch her in that intense damp heat. She spun round like a top before the long mirrors, took from her box her new Mandalay lungi, and posed in it after the fashion of the Pwe Princess.

"I wish you'd be quiet, Ma Twai—my head aches, and I want to lie down," said Ian at last, and climbing under the mosquito netting he shut his eyes and tried to rest.

The instant he was hidden from view, Ma Twai squatted by the window, and her gaiety dropped like a mask. The dusky light through the green chicks showed fearful anxiety wrinkling her little forehead, and her mouth set in a narrow line.

The very worst had happened to her! Moung Than had returned, and would claim her! She had grasped his intentions even in those few seconds, and the fact that he still cared for her. It was soothing to her vanity that she was longed for, even in the face of her infidelity, but her one desire now was to be rid of him.

She cast back her thoughts to the day, two years ago, when she had stood beside him in the little chapel of the American Mission in Kyiang Lon, that funny Karen village in the outlying forest beyond Mandalay—and pouted with contempt. She had accompanied her aunt to inspect some of her paddy-fields there, and the gay young Karen, with his new police uniform, had sauntered past the house where

they stayed, at "Lads-go-courting-time" in the evening. . . . He had a luring tongue and a smart figure, and Ma Twai was much bored in Kyiang Lon . . . and it ended in her consenting to marry him. Her mother and aunt raised no violent objections, because Moung Than was about to leave with the punitive expedition against some dacoits of the Wa tribe, and the sayah Ma See privately consulted, predicted that he would certainly be killed soon. Since the marriage was agreeable to Ma Twai, and amused her for the time, why should they interfere ?

He was one of the Mission's most promising disciples, and thus, though she was unswerving in her own ideas of religion, to please him, Ma Twai tolerated the, to her, funny performance of bathing in the river in a white lungi, and having many mantras said over her by the American thakins—all with a gravity which delighted the worthy missionaries. They would have been saddened had they known that, since, she had just gone to the pagoda as usual, and had discarded the A B C book which she had then begun to study to please Moung Than.

The other Karens, appraising the situation more correctly, took the ceremony as a joke, and bet with each other as to how long the flighty Burmese girl would remain with Moung Than.

She herself held this marriage no more binding than the purely Burmese form of taking each other for man and wife before the village elders, and resolved that when she was weary of her husband she would sue for a divorce in the customary way of applying three times to those patriarchs who had witnessed it, never doubting that it would be obtained with similar ease.

In a month Moung Than had left with the expedition, and Ma Twai returned to Mandalay, and thence up river to Mingaing with Ma See, reflecting comfortably that the sayah's prophecy would come true, and save her even the trouble of the divorce. It had so chanced that there had been no other Burman who knew them in Kyiang Lon, and mother and daughter agreed to keep the marriage a secret, for why should they mar Ma Twai's pleasant and innocent little flirtations as the village belle, if her encumbrance was gone for ever ?

Moung Than wrote saying that the expedition was going far from the farthest little post-station, into the enemy's country, and he would write again when possible ; this letter Ma Twai cunningly took down to the steamer at Panshwe, and got the cheerful Babu on board to read for her.

For a whole year afterwards she got no more letters, and during this time Ian came into Mingaing. . . .

And then on the day of her adventure in the flood had come another letter—proving too plainly that Moung Than was yet alive. Favourable Fate, in the guise of a new Babu in the shore post-office, had enabled her to return the letter to its sender, and so averted catastrophe then; but now—if he should pursue his claims, and present himself before Ian, the result would be fatal. Ian would send her away in disgust, for a faithless she-leopard. Her gaze lit on the nice new box full of dainty clothes, and she realised poignantly what Ian's dismissal would mean to her—she would be no longer a thakin's thakinma, only a low policeman's wife. . . . Never!

Was she to lose her thakin for a silly Karen? It was condescension enough on her part to have made such a one happy for a whole month—without his presuming to claim her now for ever. .

She felt she would kill him sooner than leave Ian—and her brow creased up again, for strong young policemen are awkward things to kill, even in Burma, where little snakes may be readily had. . . .

Wild schemes flitted through her head as she sat there, but presently she had a calmer plan. She would persuade Moung Than to keep away for a while, promising him to return to him when she had got more presents from Ian.

Then she would persuade Ian to take her to his country over the black water, where she would be safe from Moung Than.

She shoved a bit of the betel Ian hated into her small mouth and chewed away, revolving wiles in her mind, reflecting that by good luck he would go to the Club at sundown, and then she could slip out as she had said, and parley with her annoyer.

By Ian's deeper breathing she knew he slept now, and, softly as a bat, she flitted over and peeped through the mosquito-net at his handsome dark head on the whiteness of the pillow. The clear-cut, resolute lips were just parted, and the long lashes showed well on the smooth tanned cheek.

Verily, this was a man, not a shallying, lovesick fool like Moung Than, she thought—and she knew that she would never give him up, even though she did murder for his sake.

The room was fearfully hot, and restlessly she went out into the wide tile-floored corridor, on to its end, and thence down into the hall.

It was vacant save for an elderly Burmese woman, a contractor's wife, who was sitting enjoying the novel sensations of a chair, and of hearing the newspaper read to her by the junior book-keeping clerk, a spruce Babu, also enjoying the display of his own knowledge.

She spoke as Ma Twai neared them.

"Ahmeh! It is great news! I must tell my cousin, Ma Shwe, that her thakin's threats to turn her away when he is angry are useless—she is bound to him by this law."

She laughed delightedly.

Ma Twai pricked up her ears eagerly.

"What is that you read?" she questioned.

"Good news for the women of Burma, little sister—sit down and hear it," replied the elder woman genially, pushing forward another chair. "No more faithless thakins going over the water and leaving the maidens here desolate. For the Government has made a law that if we marry a thakin, he must hold to it, even as if we were of his own people—whether we stay here or whether we go to his country—but he cannot put us away."

"Are you sure it is true?" asked Ma Twai, flushing excitedly.

"Of course it is true!" replied the Babu importantly, sticking his flashy pin into his glaring "Europe" tie. "Shall I explain it all to you? Much is written in the paper—all his Excellency's speech."

And then, shorn of his extravagant gestures, stripped of his native verbosity (and with some additional explanations), these were the amazing tidings which he poured forth into Ma Twai's greedy little ears.

During the past year, whilst Ian and Donalbain

had been living so isolated in their forest, public events had moved with a speed which few people realised until the great political coup was an accomplished fact.

John Cade, Imperial M.P., was a very earnest young man, with a clean-shaven face, a pair of piercing grey eyes, and a ferociously determined conscience, which, had he lived six centuries earlier, would have made him an excellent lance-in-fist Don Quixote. But living in the present age, he merely went into Parliament and applied all his energies, until other members pointed him out to country cousins as the man of the future —if they were of his party they did not hesitate to say " of the present " with emphasis.

Quixote-like, his chief aim in life was the righting of wrongs, and incidentally he had the ambition to become Prime Minister and so right more ; and as he usually carried his points, large or small, there was every reason to suppose he would achieve this also.

Among his collection of wrongs to be righted loomed a huge one—no less than the vast question of how to deal with the Eurasian problem in the British East,—and where countless viceroys and men of power had feared to tread, in rushed young Knight John, bold to rashness.

Though he was of the most Progressive party in Parliament, he was Imperialistic in his methods

—he realised that the best way to choke an evil plant is to uproot it if you can, and if your spade is not strong enough, then cut off the fibres one by one.

The form of this particular evil had been perhaps Cade's earliest resolution, since his father had been a general in the Indian army, and consequently he saw for himself the crying need for its prevention. One of John Cade's young uncles had legally married a pretty Eurasian girl, but when he unexpectedly inherited a distant relation's title, he promptly managed to trump up a case for divorce against her, and won it, so that he was left free to return to England and marry a woman of his own race and position. Just as the divorce was being granted, however, the poor girl died of a broken heart, leaving her two luckless babies to be brought up by her old mother in Madras.

Little John never forgot her—she always represented to his mind the legions of other unfortunate girls also deserted by their European mates, when once the man was weary of his passion and his toy.

And the voices of these women's hapless brown children, too, seemed to cry with awful sound from all the East: "We are neither black nor white—and the world has no use for us!"

Though he felt a very small Jack the Giant

Killer, before the huge ogre's castle of Eurasia, Cade never faltered in his determination to pull it down, and he prepared the first wrecking wedges with consummate craft, and worked on with the conviction of a man who knows himself to be inspired. He took advantage of a time when a tremendous naval and military problem was agitating all the Home Press, to draft out a Bill so stringent and audacious in its measures, that the path of a white man desiring a brown woman would be so beset with obstacles as to be well-nigh impassable.

John Cade knew that the only way to stop gambling is to surround the game's playing with so many prohibitions that it becomes not worth the candle. Hence the Bill's first clause was, that if any white man or woman should unite themselves to any native partner, whether before a magistrate or with merely the tribal ceremonies before the village elders, they should be held lawfully husband and wife, and be unable to obtain divorce therefor, excepting under the same conditions which have hitherto prevailed in the United Kingdom.

But the second clause was even more drastic. It was that if any such parties should be known to cohabit for more than one year by twelve witnesses, they should be held married, and the woman should thus be entitled to sue the husband for maintenance, if he should abandon her. If

he should abandon her before the year, and there should be a child, he became liable for a fine of one thousand rupees, and even in the case of legal and continued marriages a tax of five hundred rupees for each birth was imposed. In default of the thousand rupee fine, the penalty was a year's imprisonment; and Cade hoped that this would be most effectual in the case of the poorer white residents in the East.

Naturally the Bill did not interfere with the marriages of natives among themselves, but only between brown women and white men, or the reverse. Though this latter union is comparatively a rare one, it sometimes occurs that Indian students in Britain wed their landladies' daughters when they already have a wife or two in Hind.

Cade had in mind yet a further Bill which he meant to pass through the English House in the future—but that is by the way.

We return to the present Bill.

Its other clauses, such as very heavy damages for breach of promise of marriage, and a high rate for maintenance and liability for the education of children till the age of fourteen, added to its stringency, and Cade smiled as he thought of the joy of numberless native lawyers in pursuit of absconding sahibs, in the certainty of looting "law costs" for their feminine clients.

In the old days a man could merely hand over a few hundred rupees to Lucksmi or Ma Pan, and

leave her stowed away in her village, but now, to be sued by her for restitution of conjugal rights was another matter!

Now, as a very distinguished writer upon Imperial affairs states, the most important measures that are passed in our laws are often manufactured in a way that would greatly astonish the worthy newspaper readers of Britain, and some of the biggest reforms have been the least talked over by the general public before they became facts; and so it was with John Cade's Bill.

One of his closest friends was the Secretary of State for India, and he chanced to be a man of very stern moral views, so that he warmly approved of the Bill, and sent it straightway to the Imperial Government of India for criticism, to be forwarded afterwards to the various local Governments for the same purpose.

It would be too tedious to detail all John Cade's most effective wire-pulling and great-person-shaking in the affair, but, from the first, Fate seemed to favour the Bill in every way.

One instance may be cited, namely, that when the first draft of the Bill reached Calcutta, John went out and stayed with the Viceroy, an old friend of his father's, a man of strict morals, whose Puritan ancestry doubtless impelled the Cromwellian methods by which he ruled where it lay in his power. Luckily for Cade, just then,

one of the Viceroy's young relations in a crack regiment in the Provinces got himself badly entangled with a handsome and proud Rani, and the consequences threatened to be so serious that the Viceroy thumped a green baize table with vehement fist and vowed that he would uphold the Bill with all his might if it would only "put a stop to these damnable coffee matches!"

John also possessed another uncle, a member of the Viceregal Council, and a weighty personage therein; he was an enthusiastic eugenist . . . and he patted his nephew heartily on the back as he scanned the draft. The Bill met with a strange success with the local Governments, for by great good luck one Governor was also a eugenist, and another a particular friend of the Secretary of State and had an eye to his own elevation later,—and everywhere else it met with the same approval.

Strangest of all, the Bill did not at first excite half the public opposition its author expected—perhaps because just then a sharp frontier "little war" was interesting Northern India to the exclusion of most other subjects, and a big plague diverting the attention of the Southern Provinces.

A few newspapers discussed it in a half-hearted way, much as the annual visit of the sea-serpent is commented upon—for no one

outside official circles took it seriously till it had passed.

But then, these were the days of that fatal British procrastination, until the enemy is at the gate and it was so dimly anticipated that the Bill would pass at all—much less in one session.

When the Bill arrived in the Burma Legislative Council in Rangoon, strongly recommended by the Secretary of State, and with a private letter from the Viceroy to the Governor-General, the Burmese members of Council rubbed their hands with joy and prepared for once to vote in entire accordance with their own wishes and with the official element on the Government of Burma.

The Bill returned to Calcutta with the support of the Burma Legislative Council, and was introduced by John's uncle at the Imperial Council, where the presence of many rapidly Swaraj-view-holding native members gave it yet another aid.

The Viceroy, spurred by his private feelings and by Cade's tactful pushings, made a magnificent speech—and a notable native member had made another previously; the Secretary of State gave his final consent; in fact, to be brief, it passed with a small majority—but it passed!

Then only, when it was too late, the gathered storm of indignation from the White Press and Public of India broke.

It was useless for the minority of Unofficial White India to oppose what Swaraj-supported Official India chose to decree!

The papers were full of bitter letters about the European education of the higher classes of natives, as usual, but vehement brown editors of the Indian press lauded the Bill which gave "their rights" to "the ladies of India," with all the adjectives dear to studious B.A.'s.

As the Babu made his final panegyric of the Burmese woman's new security, Ma Twai clasped her hands closely, joy surging like a fountain in her soul.

Aha! Now let Ian try to put her away once she was rid of that thrice idiotic Moung Than! Yet quickly her natural instinct for making a good impression, no matter what her audience, rose up, and she checked a well-feigned half yawn.

"This will be joy to a girl of our village who feared her thakin would desert her, when I tell her of it," she said. "For myself, it is of no real importance, since my husband M'Rosse thakin loves the very flowers I take from my hair. Still, such laws are good for the less fortunate. I forgot to bring enough betel from home—perhaps you know where is a good stall in the great bazaar?" she ended, smiling very pleasantly at Ma Hehn, the amiable contractor's wife.

She was longing to retire to a corner and exult in the glorious news, but rallied her roving

impulses sufficient to accept Ma Hehn's kind proposal to teach her a funny game called "Patiense" that white people liked so much, and sat on a very ugly wool-worked Victorian chair at a spindly-legged table in the drawing-room and played with her till tiffin-time.

CHAPTER XX

COMPLICATION

During tiffin Ian was strangely irritable, and found fault with the cooking so often that Ma Twai stared in surprise at him. She was trying to copy his use of a fork on a rissole, and frowning as now and then she dropped bits. Then she smiled at him sweetly as Chinese molasses.

"I have seen such a lovely set of jade jacket-buttons on the dress of Ma Hehn, a lady whom I met in the hall!" she said insinuatingly.

It struck him sadly that she had not smiled like that at him for some days,—and now she wanted something!

"Can you not give me some, darling?" she went on.

"You are fair enough in my eyes, dearest, without wanting any more ornaments. I think you adorned like a princess already," he said gently.

In a flash her affectionate gaze hardened, and her lips set close, and then just as quickly it was fair weather again in her face, and she was

quietly helping herself to more iced soda. But Ian had noted it and sighed. He half thought of going early to the Club, yet he shrank from meeting Kate's uncle, General Iden, if he were in the town, since he had guessed at his love for Kate in the old days,—and some busybody who had seen them arrive might have told him of Ma Twai.

He knew that many men would secretly sympathise with his Burmese marriage though their English wives would not; but after all he need not heed their adverse criticism, for they could only banish him from their tea-parties, and now he didn't care a hang for them—no, nor any flirty, tennis-playing sisters-out-from-home whom they might have, either!

He went upstairs, and feverishly began clearing off a pile of neglected business letters, and worked thus till the waning day warned him to don another suit, and depart Clubwards.

Ma Twai watched his gharry drive away, and waited a quarter of an hour to make sure he would not return. Then she strolled casually to the hotel door, hoping Than Dine would not spy her. But he had profited by Ian's absence to slip down the bazaar in search of a quiet gamble at fantan, and none of the people on the veranda noticed Ma Twai gliding down the steps and drifting onwards into the glowing sunset along Strand Road.

By the corner loitered a brown figure deep golden in the splendid light.

She trembled as she stopped, apparently casually, and asked :

" Where is a good place to talk alone ? "

He indicated the stretching road.

" Along under one of the wharf buildings there is only a chance coolie at this hour. But, Ma Twai, my wife, why do you shrink thus from me ? I have been faithful to you, oh beloved—have had but one thought these many weary moons—to return, bringing you my sergeant's rank and my saved rupees. I have many,—one hundred also which a shikarring thakin gave me for turning a buffalo aside from horning him, with my bayonet. My little dove, why have you forgotten me ? "

She scanned his face with keenest anxiety, but to her utter surprise and relief she saw not the wild anger of the morning, but a melancholy tenderness, and his tone was almost imploring.

Yet she also was Burmese, and she almost feared the change veiled some subtle trap, though she hid her qualms with a great effort as she sought for a wary answer.

" I thought you were dead, Moung Than. I heard nothing from you, and I then grew to love my thakin,—he is gallant and strong, and gives me beautiful gifts, and I have much glory as his wife. Why did you never return ? "

They were beside a great wharf-shed, filled with

brown dusty bags of grain, all in silence save for a scurrying rat, so they entered and squatted by the wide open doors overlooking the shimmering water.

"I did write—but you must have missed having the letter," replied Moung Than, devouring her every line with admiring eyes. "When the Wa Expedition was ended, I had an offer to stay on duty at the ruby mines at Mogok—and there I caught many illicit miners, and gained rewards—Ahmeh—I tell you, I won the esteem of all my comrades both there and in the accursed Wa country! It is a terrible place—hills like pagodas for steepness and slippery as their sides, —and dacoits in every bush. I remember one night we had camped by a stream, expecting the dacoits to rush us during the darkness; the fire blazed high, and I saw a man peer from the jungle. I rushed forward and sliced off his head with my dah, like a ripe mango from the stem! He was the chief of the dacoits, and I was made sergeant therefor."

Ma Twai was sure all this was a boastful lie, but she pretended to believe every word of it, and exclaimed with delight at the proper pauses, inwardly astonished at the quietness with which he sat there talking during this extraordinary interview.

With satisfaction she saw how the life in the police had improved him. He was tall for a

Burman, and now, well drilled, smartly groomed, he wore his neat uniform and perfectly rolled turban with an excellent air. He had twined his upper lip's scanty hairs into a nice little moustache, and both hands and face were immaculately clean and shiny as burnished bronze.

Ma Twai languished a look at him as she cooed:

"You were so angry with me this morning, beloved! But you understand now—and are not angry any more?"

The Burmese mind has workings of its own not to be understood by the level British reckoning. Moung Than was admiring every dainty detail of Ma Twai, and he rubbed his lean brown hands enjoyably together as he replied:

"Can I be angry when I am with my adored? You are mine at heart, Ma Twai—and we will return to Mandalay together——"

She smiled winsomely back, and edged nearer to him on the bags.

"Yes, but not just yet—ah, do not frown, Moung Than—wait—I will soon come to you, but I want my thakin to go away to his own land in peace first. He talks of going, and if he leaves thinking I am his, he will make no trouble, but he might half kill me, and get you dismissed the service (for he can be very violent) if he knew that we are——"

"Lovers," smiled Moung Than fatuously.

She chewed away at her betel, outwardly serene,

but inwardly uneasy as to his next move, as she nodded assent.

But she had not long to wait. Her nearness and his love carried his prudence away, and he turned to her with open arms, his dark eyes shining with longing.

"Oh, Ma Twai—my wife!" he jerked passionately. "Come!"

She stayed quite still, held by feelings she hardly understood.

She loved Ian with most of her ambitious and passionate sides, but there were times when she found in his love a coldness, a reserve she could not fathom. Now Moung Than was no doubt foolish and weak (that is, easy to mislead), but he was a man of her own people and knew the hotter fires of their passions. But she was clever even now, this crafty little daughter of Ma See, and she made her bargain in the very nick of time.

She laughed coquettishly and fenced him off with her slim hands.

"Yes, I will come, beloved; but you must have patience. Promise me that you will be discreet and not let him see you anywhere? Then I will do all in my power to hasten his going away—and the day after, I will come to you! Embrace me once, and remember that delay makes all meals sweeter."

"But you do not truly love this white man?" he asked, his jealousy suddenly rising.

"Only for his gifts—and when I was lonely he was useful! It is dreadful being a widow—far worse than being a maid," she smiled back. He clasped her fiercely for a moment, and then she drew away from him, and squatted down again; but during the embrace she had adroitly picked his pocket of his tobacco, and was rolling herself a neat cigarette, quick as a conjurer!

She inhaled it deeply, luxuriously, and smiled happily at the now dusky shed-roof; she was really revelling in the ease of Moung Than's company, even in the familiar sense of uncritical eyes watching her spit the betel-stained saliva away.

With Ian she had always a certain embarrassed feeling of being on her best behaviour; and now she knew it was this which had worried her for the last few weeks.

She wanted to stay with Moung Than, and go with him for an hour down the warm, sweet-scented, torch-flaring bazaars, to chaff the other girls and have all the Burmese youth in Rangoon admire her beautiful clothes. She looked at her deluded, resurrected husband with regret, not all feigned, for the moment, as she said:

"I must go into the hotel now, lest he return. Come with me to the corner and then walk off without speaking, so that none shall guess we have spoken before."

"But I must see you again to-morrow, beloved

—I have so much to say to you. You have not told me the half of your news either," he pleaded, as they went back under the shining evening stars.

"Yes, if I can. But remember I have always that silly Than Dine hanging about to bear tales of my doings. Do not grow too impatient, for most likely my thakin will go somewhere to dinner, and then I can come safely. I saw an old kullah watchman pass the shed, but he will not say anything. Ah, it is good to be with you once more, Moung Than! But you will have to make love to me all over again, as if we were still maid and bachelor!"

And he, wanting nothing better, felt to be walking on gold in a magic nat country, with joy.

She meanwhile was exulting in the ease with which she had rolled him in the silken nets of her schemes, and secured his temporary silence, during which she could safely escape to Europe with Ian!

"I will tell him Ian is going alone, and then sail with him," she thought, as she, quite unseen, regained the hotel in the soft dusk.

She was industriously threading a bracelet of gold beads on the floor when Ian came in from the Club.

CHAPTER XXI

CATASTROPHE

THE long veranda of the Grand Hotel, Rangoon, stretched pleasantly cool under its green chicks and thick white pillars, and its crimson tiles were wet with timely sprinklings of the watchful white-clad boys' dampened water whisks and buckets. Outside, the Strand Road was full of movement, for it was the Bibby Line day, and people were going to meet the signalled ship.

The traffic was as varied as any in the East. Bullock waggons from the wharf laden with bales, boxes, or grain bags; gharries with absurdly small ponies and draggled-looking Indian drivers; now and again a daintier country cart, carved and painted, drawn by pretty cream bullocks, and containing a pair of girls in their best attire for their day in the capital; next, an occasional rickshaw with a white-suited Englishman; a bicycle and a prosperous black-satin-garbed Chinaman, with tucked-up pigtail; a smart buggy with an officer and large topi'd lady—all

the bustle of a picturesque port streamed towards the docks in the blazing sunlight of the winter morning.

Ian sat upon the veranda and eyed the moving kaleidoscope with indifferent gaze. Ma Twai, from a long chair, stared sullenly at the road. She had wanted to go back to the bazaar and bargain for another scarf she had seen the night before, and Ian had told her not to, since she had already bought four.

A pretty Frenchwoman on her wedding trip came out upon the steps, and her filmy lace blouse filled Ma Twai's heart with envy.

"I would have a thing like that," she said to Ian.

"No, my flower, it would not suit you so well as your own jacket. See the high neckband and the narrow waist," replied he quietly.

"Never mind—I like it," she said, pettishness in the tone. "Her shoes also—they are grey and soft like mice. Give me some!"

Ian raised his brows wearily. It was one perpetual ask and refusal since their arrival here. Besides, one denial did not quieten her desires—she would harp on anything she had seen a dozen times, until, if it were at all in reason, he would cede for very weariness.

The Frenchwoman had a pretty gold filigree necklet, bought most likely at Naples on her way out, and Ma Twai fingered her once prized dalee-

zan discontentedly, and scrubbed one sandal on the tiles.

She made a far daintier picture in her pale green lungi, fascinating cream and heliotrope shot-silk scarf, and a fine purple velvet trail of violets from a European milliner's over one ear; but she was out of love with herself, and the white women she saw now were delightful novelties to her.

Ian looked at her critically under half-lowered eyelids. Yes, she was fair—warm of colour, round of limb and cheek; but her sulky expression seemed to darken the bronze of her skin and thicken her lips and shorten her nose in a strange way.

Presently a little English child, all golden curls and blue ribbons, darted out upon the veranda too, rolling a ball and chattering merrily to an elderly Swiss nurse who came and sat sewing in the corner.

A little yellow child of mixed Chinese and Burmese breed came up to the steps, making friendly faces at the tiny maiden, and as Ian saw them he had a sudden gasping pang at the contrast.

He tried to turn his eyes to the book he held.

A servant came out with a handkerchief the nurse had dropped, and Ma Twai, more to show her authority than because she was thirsty, told him to bring her some soda and ice, and he

obeyed, but there was a veiled sarcasm in his salaam which Ian noticed and could not resent.

He looked up quickly a minute later, and hot anger shot through him, for two young Burmans of the European-aping town type were passing in a dogcart and staring at Ma Twai with open admiration, and she was coquettishly simpering back.

"Do not look at those men," he said sharply to her. "They are rude."

Ma Twai pouted. "Why should they not look at me? I am not a nun," she retorted. "I belong to you, my beloved—but it shows that I am fair. You should be proud of your wife."

And somehow he had never been less proud of her!

"Never mind, you are not to stare back at them," he said sternly.

She looked at him with the air of a naughty child about to cry.

"You are a cruel grandfather," she said defiantly. "But I will obey you—because I love you."

And there was odd irritation to him in her tone. Just then another couple came out upon the veranda—an elderly artist who was making a painting tour through Burma, and his wife.

He was a tall, keen-eyed man, with red hair and a suppressed sense of humour—suppressed by the constant henpeckings of his lean, grey-

haired dame, whom he had married from a small Scottish town for the excellent reason of a nice old stocking she possessed.

He looked now at Ma Twai, sitting there pouting stormily, and wondered which was worse to put up with—her flaming Oriental tempers, or the cold, acid, set-the-world-straight moralisings of his domestic burden—and sighed half enviously.

She noted Ma Twai through her pale eyelashes, sniffed, and drew her starched petticoats tightly round her as she sailed down the steps.

Ian fumed. The treatment they had received since they came to this hotel brought home to him, as nothing else could have done, the meaning of his choice. He squared his shoulders defiantly, however. It did not matter : he would take her back to the jungle again, where she would forget her desires for the jarring things of civilisation, and seem as she did in Mingaing.

But yet—he saw the air of the artist's wife, who rather reminded him of a favourite aunt at home, and wondered, if they went to see her, would she, too, have that icy stare, that crushing contempt for his Burmese wife ?

Still, he could never forget that she had saved his life, and cleaved to him when the one other woman he had trusted and loved had forsaken him. And was he already grudging such fidelity its reward ? No ! He must bear what he had

lifted and not fail under the burden. And yet—he was beginning to find the ransom dear. . . .

Just then the Swiss nurse took the little child away for her midday sleep. On the table she left her coat, a particularly badly cut German thing of khaki drill. Yet it had bright nickel buttons and white braid, and Ma Twai watched it a moment, then calmly walked over and put it on before one of the strips of looking-glass in the veranda wall. Ian's topi was lying on the table, and she set it on her head in an absurd imitation of the Frenchwoman's headgear. The effect was disastrous. She was dwarfed by the coat, vulgarised incredibly by the hat, and her skin seemed turned by the khaki to its own colour. She looked like some ill-clad little Eurasian nursemaid. Yet she was smiling at her reflection, entranced by the novelty.

He watched her with yet another pang of worry.

And then, unheralded by presentiment or warning, Ian's doom fell upon him with the swiftness of a stage tragedy.

The passengers from the Bibby liner were now drifting past upon the bustling Strand Road, and red-clad Cook's porters were trotting in with dressing-bags and suit-cases. People were following them, laughing, talking, greeting others excitedly. Ian saw a man he knew by sight with a sweet, fresh, yellow-haired girl in white, his

bride, whom he had just met, enter the hotel, and turned his head aside.

Even as he stared quietly at the tiles, a sound fell upon his ear which made him look up as if a shot had struck him, and dumb stricken, for one terrible instant, he moved no muscle to rise from the chair.

There, all radiant in creamy silk, a chain of big turquoise-matrix round her uncollared throat, her chestnut hair glinting under a large snowy felt hat, her eyes shining with the light he had never hoped to see, holding out her hands in gladness, stood—Kate!

Dimly he heard her words of joy and astonishment.

"Ian, Ian, how perfectly lovely to find you down in Rangoon! I was just sending you a wire in the hotel office, and they said you were here! My dear, how pale you are! I'm not my own ghost,—I'm real! You see, my good Primitive Man, I thought I'd give you a primitive shock—and I've come back. . . ."

She flushed pink as dawn-clouds as she paused and looked shyly aside. Then she smiled rapturously and playfully held out her hands to pull him from the chair, as, still paralysed, he lay there.

He felt this moment was even worse than the agonising second waited by the tigress before springing up the tree, and for still another sixty pulse-beats he could find no words.

"I came out with Aunt Nora—joined her at Marseilles with Uncle Jim—she's just seeing the coolies aren't overpaid, and they'll be here in a minute—and Uncle Alex—he didn't know you were down-country either. What's the matter, Ian? Have you had fever—you're shaking," continued Kate, puzzled alarm spreading over the sweet flush.

Then, snapping the numbing spell, he rose to his feet, saying hoarsely:

"Oh, Kate—love—why didn't you write sooner? What have you done?" in a voice which seemed to belong to another man.

His strange air and wooden movements set every fear in Kate's being wide awake. Instinctively she sought the quickest, simplest words for explanation.

"I came because no letter could have explained—I knew at last, all of a sudden, that I *did* love you—and Auntie was just starting—and I had to come then, or perhaps wait months—so I simply came—and thought I'd give you a big surprise. Oh, don't look at me like that! What's wrong?"

"Kitty—Kitty—how can I tell you?" he faltered out. "But I thought you didn't care—and I was all alone—and——"

"Hello! Good morning, Mr M'Rosse! Now, how nice to find you here!" said a cheery voice behind.

Aunt Nora, tall, thin, well-groomed, from her elegant chiffon-draped topi to her neat tan shoes, was smiling and dumping down her little jewel-bag on the table.

"The two uncles are coming on directly—seeing that the boys find the umbrellas and golf-cases. Why didn't you look my husband up when you came down to Rangoon? He said he'd never seen or heard of you for ages when he met us on board. We've come to the hotel because it seems my ayah's kiddie has scarlet fever—and it's been running about the bungalow while she was preparing my room, and we thought it had better all be fumigated before I go home. . . . Aren't you astonished to see Kate? But she insisted upon coming . . ." she ended, with a sly and genial twinkle at Ian.

During all this, Ma Twai's back had been towards them as she stood at the far end of the veranda, totally absorbed in the mirror; but now she turned and, laying aside the hideous khaki coat and hat, came forward, shikoing quietly to the new-comers.

Long experience of Burma and a certain assuredness in the girl's manner were an urgent hint to Aunt Nora, and she turned sharply on Ian.

"Who is this lady, Mr M'Rosse?" she asked in a dangerously calm tone.

For a horrible minute he stood, his tongue

feeling as if it would only click insanely against his palate, staring at Kate in absolute torment.

All the gladness was gone from her face, all the eager words chilled on her lips as she scented the appalling fact, but she stretched out a hand in brave appeal for the truth at any cost.

"Tell me, Ian—why—what?" she stammered.

And he called on all his manhood and replied with simple directness:

"This is my wife, Ma Twai Glay, Mrs Iden! My only defence is that Kate refused me, and I thought she meant it—and we were married three weeks ago! Kate—Kate—dear!"

As her brain seized his meaning, she swayed and fell into the chair, quite unconscious for the first time in her life.

As she gasped and dropped, Ma Twai, her whole spirit glowing with triumph, grinned widely, but Aunt Nora marked it with fury.

"Get out of the way, girl!" she said curtly in Burmese. "She must not see you when she wakes! Quick!"

Ma Twai merely tossed her head scornfully and took the opposite basket chair with defiant dignity.

"I am the wife of Thakin M'Rosse now!" she said calmly. "Order your kullah ayah away—not me! It is well that Thakinma Iden should suffer too for her cruelty to him before!"

Ian rallied his scattered senses immediately as he bent over Kate, and then his quick glance told him other people were mounting the veranda steps—and the hotel's cool, dark drawing-room offered a welcome shelter from curious eyes.

"Go, and send the boy with some iced soda in there, Ma Twai! And then you go up to my room and wait till I come. You may be my wife, but you will obey me—I do not want you here just now!" he said to her, his tone simmering with such anger as he had never before shown her.

He lifted Kate quickly and carried her through the long French window into the inner room's dusk, and laid her on a sofa; but she neither sighed nor stirred—the shock had been too great.

Aunt Nora sank on her knees beside her, and fanned her with a newspaper; and he threw himself into a chair close by, as though his legs would no longer bear him.

"What can I say—or do?" he said brokenly. "You know how I loved Kate when we were here together before—and since—Aunt Nora! But a man's only a man, and she treated me like a statue. She gave me no hope, and I was in despair—said her refusal was definite; and I had a very bad accident with a tigress, when Ma Twai saved my life, and nursed me afterwards, so I married her, and as she wanted to see Rangoon we came down for a few days. That's my whole

story, Mrs Iden—and you must judge me as you will. Only you know *how* I loved Kate before ! "

He raised his hands to his damp forehead, and his eyes were hidden. More pity than either contempt or anger shone in Aunt Nora's look. Over Kate's quiet figure she reached him a motherly, sympathetic hand.

" Yes, I know what it is for a boy out here alone—for the Burmese woman is as wily as Lilith must have been—but it's a terrible thing ! Is there no way to free yourself ? You really married her ? "

" Yes, before the village elders. But do you think Kate would forgive me even if I could send Ma Twai away ? You know her sense of justice about everything—and Ma Twai doesn't deserve anything but kindness—her worst fault is a hot temper sometimes," he said generously. " No, Auntie (I've thought of you so long as Auntie)," he went on apologetically ; " no—I'm done for ! I'm unworthy of her now ! "

" Don't be too sure—heaps of other girls have forgiven men from Burma their Ma Twais," replied Aunt Nora, who was beginning to recover from her first horror of the situation, for she was broader-minded than the average Englishwoman in the matter, owing to her long residence in the East. " Kate cares for you so deeply that . . . well . . . if you were free—I wish I were as sure of winning the Calcutta Sweep as I am that she'd

forgive you! Look—she's coming to! Now, I'm going to leave you together and go and explain things to my husband and Uncle Jim Siward. You'd like me to?" she said with sublime tact, and just as Kate opened her eyes she vanished from the room.

Then with returning memory came Kate's realisation of the dreadful truth; but Ian gave her no time to shudder.

Kneeling beside her, he took her hands in a gentle clasp.

"Kate, darling, before you speak, you must hear all my story—and then you can judge for yourself why I took Ma Twai," he said, and told her all, bravely, truthfully, and concealing nothing.

And, as she heard, Kate's pride and anger melted away before the great blaze of love in his suffering eyes, and she knew that his passionate snatching of Ma Twai had been but the results of loneliness and despair. And as he ended his confession she drew to her something of his courage.

"Ian," she said in a broken voice, "you have a right to know now, dear, why I decided to come to you, and knew that I loved you more than all the world. You have had your humiliation—and now you must know mine! And perhaps you won't be able to forgive *me*!" she added with a wan little smile.

Yet, when she had ended the difficult story of her deception and grief, Ian uttered no single word of jealousy or reproach, but gathered her to him, and kissed her with all the pity in his heart.

"My poor darling Kitty!" was his sole comment, and she knew that only her own Real Right Man could have shown her that wonderful sympathy and forgiveness.

When Aunt Nora entered an hour later, Ian was still kneeling by the sofa, and Kate's head lay upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXII

AGGRAVATION

When Ian left the drawing-room to seek Ma Twai upstairs, his lips were set close, and his eye indicated stern resolution to act promptly and decisively. But, crossing the hall, he halted in utter amazement, for Donalbain stood there directing his lugale to see his luggage unloaded from a gharry!

He ran up the steps, his usually impassive features widened in a cheerful grin.

"Hello, laddie! You'll be wondering what's brought me down-country in such a takin'! Ye see, our virtue's been rewarded at last, lad! We've struck it—but come right awa' oot o' hearing o' these folk——"

He hurried to the far end of the veranda, and threw himself into a long chair in a little flurry of chuckles.

Mechanically, for he felt past surprise at anything on this astonishing day, Ian followed him.

"Ye mind a Kachin tree-feller from beyond

Yunlan ? " said the Scot, removing his topi. " About six months ago I found him wi' a snake-bite, carried him till I met some villagers, and treated the wound for him ? Well, he cam' in to see me aboot a fortnight back, and said that he'd had a wonderful dream that there was untold riches lying in the earth beyond the Three Streams behind Panshwe Second Clearing. *I* said he'd had too much opium ; but *he* said no, it was true, and he wanted me to come, as I was a good thakin who would deal fairly if we found anything. He said he was sure these wonderful heaps of yellow gold did lie on our land ; so one idle morn we went off wi' four men and tools. But when we got there his proceedings made me laugh. First, he took a luckless chicken he'd carried in a basket, and made a little stone altar of sorts. Next, he fished from his game-bag a wee alabaster elephant image, set it on another stone, made a fire, and sliced off the chicken's head with his dah, and buried some feathers. By this time I was like kickin' him for his tomfoolery ; but I saw two of the men—Kachins also—had fallen on their faces, trembling with excitement. One raised himsel' sharply, called me, and pointed at the elephant. Upon ma word, Ian, its trunk was pointing right round the opposite way to what the Kachin had set it, and as I'd been between him and it, I swear he couldn't have touched it ! He shikoed a few times towards it, and said to

me: 'Let us dig where it points, thakin! The omen is good—we are guided.' We dug—and, Ian! we found not gold, but this—this! Tons of it!"

The big man ended in a positive shout, and from his coat-pocket fairly flung a lump of something at his partner.

It was green-white jade, of the most valuable kind—the sort of stuff for which rich Chinamen will pay any price.

"Faith, I cam' right doun to register our claim for a concession," said the Scot, sitting down again like an exploded cartridge after his one bang of excitement.

But Ian's face, instead of the joy he expected, showed a blank dismay.

"My God, Angus, you've no idea what's happened! Kate's come out and has seen Ma Twai!" he blurted desperately.

For a moment there was strained silence.

"Of all the awfu' fixings!" ejaculated the other. "What can ye do?"

"What any other man with common sense would do, in my place. Ma Twai is fast losing her affection for me, and cares for nothing but the money that I give her. I must pay her a good sum, and she must leave me. Kate has forgiven me everything," he said, but uneasily and flushing crimson. "It seems a cruel thing to suggest, but when Kate's in the question——"

Donalbain's mouth opened in a helpless gape. Then he found words again.

"Ye luckless lad, ye can't get rid of her now. Oh, ma guidness, have ye no' heard what Government's done while ye were honeymooning in the jungle?"

"No—what do you mean?"

"The Government and worthy Viceroy," said the Scot grimly, "were stirred by one John Cade, M.P., from home, to pass a Bill to make white-and-native marriages as binding as English ones—even with the native ceremonies. It was to be law the first o' January—and you married Ma Twai aboot the sixth, eh? You can only divorce her like a white woman—and seemingly have had no cause! Look!"

He snatched a *Times of India* from the table, and the leader's headlines glared up: "The Binding Law's Effect in India. The Good Behaviour of the Sahibs."

"It's monstrous! It's not true! No sane people who knew the East's ways could possibly pass such a Bill. Oh!" cried Ian wildly.

"I'm afraid it's remarkably sane fact," retorted his mate. "Remember, laddie, that this is the day of the carefully handled, much-favoured native subject. Now it's the turn of the innocent brown slave ruling the wicked white oppressor," with biting irony. "I read all Cade's speeches and the rest in the *Times* on the mail-

boat as I cam' doun. You'll see from them whether 'twas possible. Man! they'll knight him for it! But I can't think how ye've never heard of it! I should have written from Mandalay—only I didn't think you were serious wi' Ma Twai when I left ye!"

Fate seemed to have conspired for Ian's ignorance indeed! For when Donalbain was nursing Falconer during the latter part of Ian's illness after the tigress's wounds, Ma Twai had obediently sent on the newspapers to him. But the dak-runner only arrived at Falconer's hut the day after its convalescent owner and Donalbain had started for Mingaing, and though, after resting, he followed them, on the way he met some Chinamen, played fantan, and won so much opium from them, that he tumbled sleepily into the camp-fire embers, and the papers, too large to go in the tin letter-box, were burned! Fearing punishment, he said nothing about it—and then Donalbain had left and Ian's marriage had taken place. On the way down-river his chats with the Americans had prevented him from reading the papers, and since his arrival in Rangoon no one had chanced upon the subject in conversation. He clenched his fists as Donalbain ended.

"It's too awful! None of the fellows at the Club said a word. It's pure ill luck! My wife for always—Ma Twai!" he gasped.

Donalbain grinned slowly. He could not resist a sly dig of reproof.

"I thocht we had done wi' light white lassies for gude when we took Ma Twai!" he said, and repented quickly as Ian's pained face reproached him.

"I do just remember hearing it proposed—or reading it somewhere—about last June," he said, searching his memory. "But my head was full of hopes of Kate, and I never gave it a second thought—it's sheer cursed fate! After all, I suppose it's only justice to the brown woman at last; but I never dreamed of it in my case. The Bill passed when I was in sheer ignorance. I might plead that?"

"I'm afraid not—British law doesn't recognise ignorance of any crime as a plea," replied his friend.

"But it's absurd—oh, absurd! Ma Twai is not really my wife. God knows, Angus, when first I took her I intended to stick faithfully to her—I thought I had lost Kate for ever—and Ma Twai herself loved me. Now she is ceasing to care for me, and Kate, my true love, has come to me. It's wrong for me to even stay with Ma Twai another day! Wrong! It may be law, but it's deadly wrong!"

"So are most cases where the Unwritten Law might be applied," said the Scot. "But, unluckily, here it's the Written Law you've got to

face, and I don't see how you are going to break the handcuffs of it!"

"But I must—I must!" He stared fiercely at the veranda roof.

"I'm afraid there'll be a good many fellows in your plight, my lad. You see, that's just where the Bill nabs them, by the clause that marriages known to have been celebrated six months before or after January the 1st, otherwise there'd have been a regular turning-adrift day of Burmese and Indian girls by their white lords before the date it was to become legal, like dogs before license day. No, Ian, you're Ma Twai's lawful husband. But cheer up, for we may see some loophole somewhere."

"Oh no! It's true—it's a living nightmare—I'm saddled with her for good! She's never been unfaithful to me—she's never done a thing—you can't put her away for bad temper. Oh, Angus; and now to make it worse there's the jade! We're rich—I could have married Kate without a cloud if I'd only taken your advice and waited a little—but you know how it was! It makes it all the worse for this find to come just now."

"Never mind that," answered Donalbain with another slow smile. "I never saw the trouble yet that money wasn't oil for, in some way or other. Let's have a look back and see if there wasn't some flaw in that wedding of yours."

Ian groaned.

"No—it was legal enough, curse it! The whole village was there. I didn't leave any hanky-panky out that pleased her to perform. Even the gold chain binding we did. Oh—oh—it will kill Kate when she knows. She fainted this morning when she even grasped I'd been 'married' native way to Ma Twai. I've been telling her that it wasn't really legal, etc., to comfort her just now, and to my utter astonishment she forgave me and blamed herself for having driven me to do it by her letters. I was going up now to talk to Ma Twai. Do you know, she was really cheeky about obeying me when Kate turned up. Said she was my wife, and I wasn't to order her about. Angus! do you think she knew about the law then?"

"I hardly know what passed, ye see," began the other gently, as he noted the hot perspiration pouring ceaselessly down his mate's forehead. "Steady now, or ye'll be having more fever. But it looks bad if she began to assert herself as you say—she'll not give you any grounds for divorce if she can help it. Go upstairs now, and find out what she means to do. And I'll go round to the department and see about our concession first, and then I'll look in and see Judge Chatham—he'll tell me all the workings of the law, as it stands, and we'll see what can be done. I wouldn't tell Miss Kate till we're sure it's a fixture—unless some other fool

blurts it out to her; and if you give Mrs Iden the hint, she'll keep the papers and news away from her as well as may be."

His cool, capable manner had its effect upon Ian's tormented mind. He pulled himself together a little and went up to their room, calmer than he would have thought possible an hour ago.

Ma Twai was sitting sedately in a corner on the floor, pretending to thanaka her face, but the moment before he entered she had been squatted with her little person one nervously jumping heap of sheer funk and worry.

The very worst had happened! Now that Thakinma Iden had come on the scene there was the certainty that Moung Than would say to her:

"You have no further excuse for stopping with your thakin—you must return to me—he will not want you any more."

Ian would not leave Burma with her, and she could hardly hope to silence Moung Than, and if he appeared to Ian she would be driven away in sheer disgust. Her only hope lay in the fact that the Babu had said that now Burmese girls once married might only be put away for grave cause, of which there was none, although that stupid Moung Than might easily say—things—in his jealous rage. If he did, and Ian believed them, she was lost. She never thought the marriage with Moung Than mattered; indeed, it never occurred to her that he had any real claim to her

now. Still her ruin was sure, for if Ian had been disgusted because she merely giggled back at other young Burmans, what would he say to Moung Than? She was quite desperate, and turned to the idea of summarily ridding herself of Moung Than. But how? If she took her little dah and the blow missed, he would be so angry that he would strike her back, or betray her promptly—perhaps even arrest her in his office of policeman so as to obtain possession of her again. She thought of a dose of something, but then she had only a very little datura powder with her to make charms, and no plants handy to make more, in the city here, and not enough for death—and no opium at all. She did not know any safe Chinaman from whom she could get any in Rangoon, and to go to a Government shop for it was out of the question. Then she had an idea, but it would be very difficult. She would tell Than Dine she had toothache and ask him to get her a bit of opium, and when she went out to meet Moung Than that evening, roll it into a sugar-and-chocolate pill, and say to him it was a famous charm she had bought from a sayah in the bazaar to make him patient and love her all the more.

Then he would be drowsy in the shed, and if she dared wait an hour or so till he fell asleep, she could quickly roll him out to the edge of the deserted wharf, tie his feet together with a piece

of string, and push him into the deep water there!

The only trouble with this plan was, that *if* Moung Than had been used to chewing sly bits of opium whilst on the march against the Was, he would be more or less impervious to the effects, and it would take a very big bit to send him off.

Then she thought of the morphia it had been needful once or twice to give Ian when he was ill with the tiger wounds; but then—that had to be put in with a needle. She wondered if the white pills that Donalbain had melted to fill the little pricker would have the same effect if they were eaten, and made up her mind to eat half of one herself to see if she felt sleepy. Only it would take her some time, as she could not steal the key of Ian's medicine box from his ring until he came to bed that night. Thus it meant twenty-four hours' delay before she could try it on Moung Than—and that might be fatal. So she was altogether on the verge of nervous hysterics when Ian came in. She adopted a penitent look on the instant, and, rising, put her little hands meekly together.

"Ian, my heart, I am sorry I spoke rudely to Meeses Iden. I was angry because I did not want to leave you then," she said humbly.

Ian looked at her and felt another pang. After all, she had saved his life from the tigress, and she had nursed him day and night afterwards

"You were very impertinent to her," he said, however. "I do not like you to assume those manners. It is true that Miss Iden was very cruel to me, but she had good reasons that you could not understand. You must be most polite when you see her again, Ma Twai."

He rolled up the chick, and the waning afternoon light showed Ma Twai's skin like polished bronze.

She stood there, dismayed beyond words. So Ian was forgiving her rival—excusing her—and reproving his own wife therefor. She felt her wrath heating, and suddenly broke into violent tears, throwing herself on her knees beside his chair.

"You love me no longer," she wailed. "You will forsake me for this great white woman! Oh, my heart, I would rather die than leave you!" she sobbed.

He bit his lip in utter perplexity—she made him feel the veriest brute alive—and yet——! He could find no words for three or four minutes, and she simply wept on, wildly, disconsolately.

Then, just as he mustered up courage enough to lay a hand on her shaking shoulder, she found her anger rising through her grief and spurted out:

"You are cruel—cruel. But you cannot put me away now!"

"Ma Twai! How did you know that? I

never thought of leaving you before you changed towards me, as you have done the last few days," he gasped. "Who told you of the law—answer me now!"

He took her wrist sharply and drew her round to face him, but she flung back her little head quite defiantly.

"A Babu here read it all in the English papers. And I asked a Burmese lady I met, Ma Hehn, and she said it was so. You married me publicly before all the village, and it was not like merely eating together and living under one roof. I am really your wife, my love. You know you loved me in the forests, and it is only that you saw Miss Iden once again that you turn away—you will forget when we are back at Mingaing."

She was clinging desperately, using a jumble of entreaty, appeal, and force to hold him to her, and, like most people who use two tools at once, missed her grip. He was sick to the soul as he saw her tear-stained face and clutching little nervous hands. How could he put her away, even if the law set him free by some lucky unforeseen flaw?

And yet—there was Kate!

His position was the very refinement of torment, and the consciousness that his own fierce folly had led him into it was the crowning touch of anguish.

He could not stand Ma Twai's presence another

moment, and rose hastily, feeling he could kick himself as he said :

"I must go down for a few minutes. You are nervous—calm yourself, Ma Twai. Yes—yes—you are my wife—hush!" and closed the door after him, feeling as if he had committed a murder.

CHAPTER XXIII

DESPERATION

MEANWHILE, Kate, in Aunt Nora's room, was listening to her kindly consolings and advice with a calmness which surprised her.

Judged by the standard of the conventional virtuous heroine so dear to the eyes of the stay-at-home English girl-reader of romances who has never been east of Suez, Kate's conduct seems distinctly reprehensible.

According to the aforesaid young lady's canons of moral dignity, she should, upon discovering Ian with a Burmese wife, have mercilessly and instantly dismissed him, and gone away to break her own heart in heroic silence, without either weighing his excuses or admitting the possibility of his release.

Theoretically, she had every cause to do so, every justification for outraged pride, jealousy, and disgust, but here, on the spot, face to face with little Ma Twai in her doll-like clothes and jingling bangles, hearing Ian's own beloved

voice explaining every extenuating circumstance, such drastic action became quite impossible. Indeed, it would have seemed absurd. During her previous visit to Burma she had naturally seen the land's less rigid morals, and this salved the very rawest edge of her scandalised horror once the first severe shock of the discovery was over.

Thus comprehending all the circumstances of the case, her own large-mindedness forbade jealousy of Ma Twai in the past, and in the clear love-light of her new understanding of Ian, which showed herself to be his sole thought and hope, she might as well be jealous of a discarded doll.

The hard lesson of Ulf's cruelty had even been useful to her inasmuch as it had braced her to meet calamity more firmly, and it had also taught her a great tolerance and pity for a man's temptations and troubles. Though her first shock had rudely shaken her ideal of Ian, when she found his arm about her and heard his quiet explanation of everything, she saw clearly how much she had been to blame for his fall, and knew the truth—that despite all, she loved him, not with the sudden dazzling impulse she had felt towards Ulf, but with the steady, sure love which endures through all things.

Then, with sound common sense, she judged that he was right in proposing to seek release

from Ma Twai, since she was ceasing to care for him, and the Burmese forms of divorce were easy.

Why should this avaricious, ill-tempered, semi-civilised little barbarian part for life two ideal soul-mates, a husband and wife suited in all things to each other, when a handsome allowance would satisfy her wholly and free them from her claims ?

Fresh from Ulf's brutal desertion, Kate even found something admirable in Ian's prompt resolution to sacrifice anything or anybody for her sake, and heard Aunt Nora's words with conviction.

" Of course, it's no use having any false sentiments about the girl, Kitty. She's only a little savage, really—she might fuss and cry for a week ; but if you went up to her village six months hence, you'd find her quite happily married to a Burman."

Hope murmured sweetly to Kate as she nerved herself to go down and discuss everything quietly with Uncle Jim and General Iden. The mere knowledge that Ian was in the house filled her with gladness and strange confidence for the future. She re-did her hair and put on a lovely pale blue shantung frock and large Tuscan straw hat, and with Aunt Nora descended to the veranda, only to find that the two uncles had driven over to the bungalow to see if the fumi-

gation had been properly carried out, for the General was a stickler where his wife's safety was concerned.

So Aunt Nora ordered tea, and they sat sipping it, and watching the passing crowds of Strand Road.

Suddenly a pleasant voice behind them arrested their attention.

"Jolly sight of bother this law'll make for fellows who've been fool enough to tie themselves to the giddy Burmese girl now! I wonder what Mike's going to do with his wife from Mandalay? He married her with a whole tamasha of folk looking on—he'll be forced to keep her!"

"Well, he might have seen last autumn that the high-falutin' Exeter-Hall-minded Government wasn't goin' to have the poor brown woman misunderstood much longer. Serves him right!" replied another boyish voice.

Mrs Iden turned and recognised the first speaker as Tommy Horner, a pleasant subaltern whom she had met at the May Myu Gymkhana the year before, and promptly greeted him, whereupon he introduced the other boy as a comrade. The formalities over, she went straight to the point, spurred urgently by Kate's eyes.

"By the way, Mr Horner, what were you saying just now about some Burmese marriages? We've only just come out, and I have had no

Burmese news at home, of course—I was far too busy shopping to read the *Gazettes* Alex dutifully posted me," she asked, stirring her tea uneasily.

"Just fancy you never hearing such a big piece of news!" replied he, with the zest of a first imparter of spicy tidings. "Why, it's set all Burma agog now—it's the Government's latest plan for reducing the luckless Eurasian crowd; whether it will or not—problem for time to solve. Fellows that want to go home and forget the little Burma girl just can't, and the lawyers are all chuckling over the bigamy cases they expect——"

"Please explain—er——" stammered Aunt Nora, not daring to look at Kate.

"Sorry I'm such a muddler—I'll begin at the very beginning. You see, this Bill——" and with that the boy explained as briefly as he could much the same facts as the Babu had done to Ma Twai Glay concerning the Bill made by John Cade and passed by the Government.

Every tinge of colour fled from Kate's face as he rambled on, and, with lips so stiff that they moved with difficulty, she broke in and asked:

"Then, if a man has married a Burmese wife, it is the same as in English law—he cannot divorce her except for the same causes?"

"I'm afraid that's so, Miss Iden," replied

Tommy, looking at her with sudden curiosity. "Poor old Burma was once full of things which didn't ought to be, and some similar Johnnies to those who back up the Unwritten Law in America have reversed things here and made a Written Law for the Burmese woman's benefit. Anyhow, I'm lucky, and so's Tim here—we've neither of us fallen victims to any creamy little Ma Pans, and we can watch other fellows wriggle with grins." He laughed gleefully at his escape, and started: "I say, Miss Iden, you do look bad—it's the heat—let me get you a whisky peg—just a small one, do——"

Kate felt her chair slipping into space beneath her, but with a valiant effort grasped the arms firmly and held up her limp head.

"It's nothing—my head's been aching all the morning," she said. "I'll go for my salts—no, never mind, you couldn't find them for me, Auntie——" and vanished through the drawing-room window into the hall, and, with the blind instinct of a sleep-walker, felt her trembling feet carry her to the marble stairs—only to meet Ian coming from his stormy scene with Ma Twai.

With a quick exclamation of dismay as he saw her face, he slipped an arm round her as she caught at the rail for support.

"Ian, what is this horrible new law they have made?" she said unsteadily.

He started, and clasped her the closer, for

fortunately, there was no one in the hall just then.

"So you have found out? Oh, darling, I only knew about it myself after I had left you this noon, and I was not going to tell you till I was absolutely sure. It's true, Kate—and we must both be brave—as brave as we can——"

The billiard room door loomed handily open at the stair's foot, and he drew her within and closed it.

"Then you are bound to Ma Twai?" she asked.

"Perhaps not, dearest—I am going out to-night to see the judge here and ask him if there is no legal loophole by which I can escape. It's not quite hopeless, I trust——"

"But if it is?" she whispered, and her voice was sharp with trouble.

She slipped forward on the long cane-seated bench which rimmed the big room round, and hid her face on his shoulder as he sat quickly down by her. She felt him shake from head to foot for a second. Then he raised her face and kissed her twice on her fluttering lips.

"If it is—then God help us, Kitty! You know I'm yours all through, even if it parts us for twenty years! Poor little Ma Twai wasn't to blame so much as I, and I've seen it clearly in the past two hours. It seems a queer thing for an unmoralising fellow like me to acknowledge

in this fix, but it shows the truth of what a good woman—a missionary she was—that came up country while I was ill, said. She declared that we paid for our sins pretty quickly, and she urged me to wait and be sure it was genuine affection and not passion only that I had for Ma Twai before I married her. If I'd waited, it would have saved me; but I gave way to my folly, and now—Kate! Kate!" as he suddenly unreined his despair—"what *shall* we do? What *can* we do? It's worst for you!"

But as the man lost grip of himself, the woman in her seemed to snatch his ebbing control and use it in his stead. She caught him to her, with more of the mother than the lover in the clasp.

"It's worse for you, Ian, dear. You'll have to bear living with her—I shan't!" she said. "But you must feel like this—that I love you always now, no matter what comes to us. And perhaps you can be freed somehow."

"Oh, I'm afraid not—horribly afraid," he answered dully. "If you'd seen her just now—imploring me not to send her away—crying like rain. It was too dreadful. I felt a brute. And I must take her away up country again—oh, Kate!"

He gripped both her hands in his, and they sat staring wildly into each other's eyes, their breath coming very short as they met the terrible thought of parting.

Wild impulses surged through Kate's head in that moment—wonders if the women of old, Sarah and Rebekah's sharing of their lords with a slave, had been—and was still—so impossible, so outrageous, after all.

To leave Ian now seemed the worst thing of all. How could she lead any life without him henceforth? And then she remembered that even the biblical woman's right was denied her, since the brown slave was the lawful first wife. She felt the sobs rising in her throat, and could hardly breathe as she spoke.

"I don't know how I'm going to live without you, though!"

"Perhaps you needn't, darling—maybe I'll get freed," he said quickly, as he fought his own pangs down for the moment. "Don't give way—I'll do everything in my power—and so will the judge, I'm sure. We've got that one ray of hope left—let's stick to it till it dies—or glows into light again. Never mind anything, Kitty—neither of us is dead—it might be worse, you know."

He drew her head close and stroked her hair, murmuring vague tender things as he mastered his despair again, and presently she laughed—a laugh which had tears in it.

"This is very wrong, Ian. I ought to push you away now, dear—you shouldn't be playing with me like this."

"That's the kind of bosh they put in proper books, Kitty, when they hold up awful examples of good heroes and heroines parting because they think they ought; in real life they don't, when it's a fact that they are the one man and woman for each other in the world. Or if they do part, it's only for a while, till the clouds clear. You are my true wife by the law of love and honour—and Ma Twai is my wife by the law of Burma. And yet—what am I saying—honour—oh yes—there's your honour too! It's awful, Kitty, darling—I shall *have* to leave you!"

He stopped and gazed miserably at the tiled floor, feeling each hope as he caught at it slipping away.

Then he forced himself to front the present as boldly as he could.

"Look here, sweetheart, it's no use thinking any more till I've seen Judge Chatham. I was just going to get a gharry and run over to him when I met you. Go to Auntie, and try not to worry any more than you can until I come in. It may not take long, and I don't think you can sleep till you know."

"No, of course not. And, Ian, Uncle Jim's here too; have you seen him yet?"

"No, I missed him this morning, and you know what happened after—— So now I'll be off to the judge and see what he can do for us—and then perhaps I'll meet Uncle with an easier mind."

He smiled at her wanly, and they went into the hall, she to run up to her aunt's room, and he down the steps upon his weighty errand.

Ma Twai, meanwhile, had been washing and thanakaing her tear-stained face into some semblance of its ordinary self, before she ventured to even peer from the window, anxiously wondering if Ian had gone out since he had taken his topi with him. Presently, to her relief, she saw him go from the veranda, hail a passing gharry, get in and drive away.

She waited another half-hour, till dusk began to drop, and then swayed cautiously, watching for any signs of her rival or her aunt, out upon the veranda, and finally edged down the steps and strolled away into the crowd: thence to get to the wharf and into the shed unobserved was easy.

Moung Than was waiting for her with a rather cross and impatient air, and it took her all her time to keep him in a fairly smooth humour, as they sat and smoked upon the gunny bags. And even with all her craft she did not succeed. He seemed bent on worrying her, first with impulsive caresses, and next with snappishness that her responses were not as ardent as he wished. She was nervous and upset, and finally a climax was brought about by a mere trifle, which undid most of her wily work in that foolish way of the unguarded moment, which has undone so many arch-deceivers.

Moung Than had been to the races that afternoon, and spoke of the strangeness of shape of the white thakinma's hats he had seen upon the grandstand.

"Mother! Some of them were like big water chatties turned upside down—and the feathers—and the silks! I wish you had been there, Ma Twai——"

"But they say what they wear here are as nothing to what they wear in England. It will—would—be nice to see them there," she said carelessly.

But in that one instant he had noted the slip of the word, and grabbed her wrist with rage as quick as a cyclone rises.

"Ah! So you think to see them there? You daughter of a thousand false mocking-birds! But you never shall. Listen, Ma Twai—I will kill you first—you are mine, you belong to me!"

He sprang to his feet, and his hands were feeling for the short knife which, luckily for her, was not in his pasoh folds now, since he was in his uniform. With working mouth and furious eyes he stood there, and she started and shuddered, too taken aback to reply for a second. Then she gained control of herself and took a new part. She too rose and, tossing her little head with its dangling roses, stared him haughtily down.

"And you expect me to love a fool like you,

Moung Than ? You hurt my feelings at every turn—you tread on my feet like a clumsy bullock—and you insult me with threats. Is it any wonder I prefer my thakin ? Tell him—go to him, if you will ! I married him by the law, and he is mine ! There is a new law since the first of this year—you can't do what you like now—inquire. Ask any learned Babu, and they will tell you it is true ! I *am* his wife, and it is only of my love for you that I have turned to you—and was going to come to you again when he had gone to his land. But now I will go with him after all ! You are a stupid fool ! "

He gasped and glared, made a wild stride forward and snatched at her little throat with two sinewy brown hands, and with a skip she backed out of his reach, scorn wreathing her lips, contempt steeling her eyes.

" Kill me, Moung Than ! I had rather die than live with such a fool as you ! " she spat at him furiously.

The contempt stung through his rage, and bit into his love as nothing else could have done. He sat down, hid his face, and broke into sobs like a beaten child. He had loved Ma Twai to the very foundation of his being, and the venom in her voice and manner he could not bear.

He had the sense to realise that force was useless to a woman who talked like that, and the hopelessness of keeping her love rushed upon

him like the river in flood. What she said of the law meant nothing, as yet, to him, but he knew then the eternal truth, that no law can compel love.

The Burman is very wise in the simple facts of life, and if his cattle will not drink willingly he knows that he cannot make them.

He tried a last appeal to her pity, and held out his hands, this time in repentance.

"Oh, Ma Twai, I love you so—can you not guess how terrible your cruelty is to me? I care for you more than any thakin—I would suffer crucifixion for you, if need be—and you turn me away like this! I am sorry, my beloved, that I hurt you, but you were very hard——"

Yet she, with her point gained for the time being, hastily reflected that she could afford to forgive him, since to-morrow night she would have the morphia which would rid her of him. But, cunningly, she seemed none too ready. She sniffed disdainfully, and refused to allow him to approach her, but finally said that if he would promise that he would not "insult" her again she might come out to him next evening if she could get away.

She was terribly afraid he would find out Kate's coming, but thought that by luck he might not get to know it before then, and afterwards—well, he might never worry her again.

So she sailed from the shed, listening to his

protests and apologies, until they reached the wharf end, and he left her.

He turned back and sat upon a pile of teak logs, staring gloomily at the grey-black water as it blinked under the faint rays of the rising moon, and his despair was like its dusky ripples.

He felt now that Ma Twai was truly lost to him, for his inmost instinct pierced through the veil of her would-be smooth promises, and he was sure that all her fair words and caresses had been lies to put him off, and the whole time she had cared for her new lover more than for him. Yet his love was so deep that it refused, even now, to settle into resignation—it struggled and held out tempting will-o'-the-wisp gleams of ideas, such as that she might tire of Ian and then return to him, or that Ian might tire of her and send her away. He felt that it was useless to go to the white man and demand her back, even though he might have rights—she would not come, after what he had just seen so plainly.

And Moung Than had his own little pride too. He did not care to flog an unwilling racer.

Then fierce anger at his own misfortunes took him by the shoulders. He blamed his luck. He blamed his own past deeds that they should demand this price of evil fortune now. It has been wisely said that a man always reverts to those beliefs which were learned before he was

six years old, and Moung Than's later Karen-Baptist faith dropped from him now like an uncomfortably tight garment. His Burmese mother's lore was the strongest in the hour of his greatest distress, and he felt that he had been a fool to forsake the consoling, all-understanding, beliefs of the Swinging Wheel, which rights all wrongs in time, and levels all despairs. He would go there and do his best by the most urgent shiko possible, to acquire the merit needful to combat the evil influences which seemed against him now. It was too late now, but he would go at dawn, and with that resolve he rose and walked rapidly back to his quarters.

CHAPTER XXIV

EXPLANATION

In the golden glow of early morning on the following day, Kate Iden stood at the foot of the little rise whereon sits throned in its majesty the eighth wonder of the modern world, the exquisite Shwe Dagon, *the* Pagoda, to which all other pagodas are as trifles.

Many desperate women have climbed that long flight of stairs to its great plateau, to cast their woes at the foot of the Buddha, the supreme consoler of acute sorrow, she thought, as she stood gazing at the two huge leogryphs with their vivid colours and open jaws, which do sentry at the stairway opening, and she wondered, woman-like, if many of them had felt so entirely despairing as she. She had never ceased to suffer during that awful sleepless night which had begun with Ian's return accompanied by the sympathising judge, about eleven, to break the news to her that there was no release except by the usual forms of divorce—for which there

[*Photo by Author*

A TAZOUNG AT THE SHWE DAGON.

was no cause, since Ma Twai was innocent of any lapse from the path of rectitude. How she had avoided fainting again she did not know, but she had seemed to pass into a stony, settled kind of anguish which enabled her to hear them out, and to thank the judge like some automaton in a puppet-show, and then retire to her room, not daring to even speak to Ian, as he watched her go, equally afraid of giving way himself, and with Uncle Jim and the General standing there like men who watch a tragedy and dare not interfere by so much as a gesture.

She could not sleep, nor could Mrs Iden, and at five the latter rose and said that as ayah had sent word that the doctor-sahib said that her child had not pukka fever, but only a slight rash, they might go home to the bungalow fearlessly.

That powerful need for quick movement, which always comes to people after the first shock is over, came to Kate again, and she welcomed the going as a relief that nothing else could have been.

She dared not risk seeing Ma Twai and Ian together again, and she knew that the parting must come soon, in any case. It would be easier, she reflected, to ask him to come and see her later in the day at the bungalow, when they were both calmer.

And yet—and yet—how was she going to

resign herself to it? It would take all her strength to fight the coming years alone—and could she fight them, after all that had happened? She had tossed like a mad thing on her wide couch all those hours of darkness, and stared imploringly at the merciless dawn which swung round as usual, even though her soul was torn in two.

Aunt Nora was kindness itself, and so was Uncle Jim, although he, like Ian, had dared to say nothing to her when the news was finally confirmed—he too was stricken into silence by the crushing blows that Fate seemed showering on the girl's luckless head. He wondered gloomily if they would ever cease, as he and General Iden sat up into the small hours, trying to find some solution to the problem, and smoking endless cheroots.

It was a relief to both when morning came, and at six, the General being due at his office, asked him to come down too, while Mrs Iden and Kate drove to the bungalow.

To be under its pretty roof and among its nice purdahs and familiar furniture was vaguely pleasant, even to Kate, and her throbbing head ached less when they had had some tea about seven; and then when Aunt Nora sent for her factotum, the Madrasi butler, to hold her little court of domestic inquiry, Kate put on her hat and, calling Paul, the said factotum's son, to

come with her, walked slowly out of the compound and along the white road into the glowing radiance of the sun.

The Idens' house was near the Pagoda's base, and, hardly heeding where she went, she found herself standing staring up at the brilliant guardian beasts, with quite a little shock.

Paul's English was not so good as his father's, and his intelligence, despite a mission school, was but a faint candle gleam, yet his grin was from ear to ear, and his undress raiment was a pair of checked trousers and a white linen coat of his father's table-suit, the whole topped by a neat Madrasi muslin turban.

He pointed upwards to the cool dark archway, up which were passing silken-robed women, some laughing and talking, others silently going with eyes fixed upon the ground and basket-trays of flowers.

"Missy go up?" he asked, and she stepped under the shadow she remembered so well, when last she had come there almost three years ago with Ian, the day before she had sailed homewards. She might as well ascend and look round once more, for she found a faint distraction in noting the wonderful details of the great shrine and its no less wonderful population.

Under the covered passages on either side of the long stair are the many queer little stalls, holding all the needs of both the pious and the

vain, which have such a fascination for the Western mind if it be in the least artistic or inquisitive. Flower-tables and baskets, with marigolds, temple flowers, and lilies, glowed fragrantly here and there, with softer tints than the gleaming red gold and green of the paper slips containing the wares of the joss-stick woman, and incense cubes were heaped in little brass bowls, flanked by yet other paper packets full of pure gold leaf, which the pilgrims buy to stick upon the large Pagoda's sides. It is a pretty sight to see a party of girls and lads, mounting high upon its gleaming flanks, their silk robes fluttering in the breeze, their merry laughs as they help each other up the steep circles of plaster which serve as foothold, to apply this gold to the vast case which forms the reliquary of the Great Teacher's hair.

Very gaudy is the candle-sellers' stock, ranging from the tiniest tapers to hold in the fingers during a short meditation, to the huge, thick painted altar-fronters, which will burn the night long, and the little red earthen oil-lamps like saucers were piled high among the waxy shafts of every hue.

The toy-girl's stall is perhaps the most fantastic of all, for she has dolls of every description, from the little thick-limbed pink and white plaster puppets like Burmese wrestlers, whose joints are wired to waggle in the quaintest way,

to the most elaborate counterpart of a princess of ancient Mandalayan splendour, with gilt pagoda-shaped coronet, and anklets of brass all complete. And as for ogres to illustrate a fairy-tale, they were all there, ready to do battle with wooden elephants, so grotesque that it would be an odd child indeed who could not laugh and love them. Rows of gay beads of glass and metal swing from hooks, along with the very good imitation of gold bangles and jacket buttons of mock jade, for the little shopwoman is not rich enough as yet to stock the real kind, and a tray of pretty round teak-and-pearl inlaid combs lies by a common European box of hooks and eyes, under the tamein of a charming dolly dressed like a Shan lady, with the big floppy straw hat faithfully imitated in miniature.

The bright-eyed dealer in triangular brass gongs smokes her cheroot with one slender bronzen hand, and with the other wields a little drumstick upon her polished wares to attract notice, and if a country fellow chances to pass, she will dart out and dangle before his cattle-proud eyes a forehead string of shining brass tinkle-bells to tempt him. If he has children with him, a set of engaging brass cymbals will also be sure to weight her wrist by a string.

The jewellery stall glitters bravely, till you would never think that the gorgeous emerald and pearl nadoungs and daleezans of every pattern,

and the arm wear (from the lion-headed bracelet without a snap to the multi-plaited or cable-cord one) could be had for so few rupees; or that a couple of sovereigns' worth would adorn a maid like a royal consort—unless one looked unkindly close at her. In brass pots stick porcupine-like clumps of ivory hairpins, of the shape of thick-ended skewers, and glass bangles warranted to wash and to look like real green-white jade of the best sort, clank temptingly in the draught up the passage.

Kate looked at all these as she passed with a melancholy interest, and, as a tiny girl of six, with a funny little top-knot tied up with gilt ribbon on her comical little head and a tartan lungi, offered her a big calla lily as a temptation to purchase more, bought a cluster of starry jessamine flowers whose scent attracted her, thinking she could either take them to Aunt Nora or lay them on one of the shrines.

An old, old woman, with a wide grin and a seductive way of shikoing, offered her a scarlet and gold paper of joss with Chinese lettering, and she gave her the coppers she asked in exchange and passed on up the steep aisle of stairs with its weirdly painted roof and walls, beyond the stalls, but not before the old dame had run after her and thrust a pair of dainty paper and gilt prayer-flags on slips of bamboo into her hands, saying something to Paul with gentle smiles.

"She saying Missy, put them in church and sorrow helping," translated Paul gravely, as, shoes respectfully in hand, he climbed behind her up the shallow steps. She looked up and saw through the carven lintel of the arch ending the stair aisle, a blaze of golden sunlight playing upon the mass of gold and white and rainbow hues of the first small pagodas which nestle round the foot of the great one, upon the platform of the fane.

There is a strange, indescribable fascination in these wonderful little shrines which no one can resist. The lover of Japanese simplicity and purity of art may protest they are over-ornamented—rococo,—bizarre, yet, before he has looked among them five minutes, he has found a delightful little lotus against a wrought-iron grille—a very ancient marble elephant beneath a quaint stone umbrella—a Buddha which might have come from Kioto by its expression,—and he gives in, and confesses that there is something to please all comers in the maze and medley of their infinite variety.

Perhaps a plain old British pilot who had steamed the Hugli to Rangoon course for ten years expressed it the best when he said of the Shwe Dragon:

"Look ye, I've spent all my spare week-ends an' off-days at that marvellous Pagoda, roamin' round the platforms, peerin' at the tazoungs

(chapels) and the folks—days—ay, and lots of nights too,—and I'm never tired of it, and I've always found a new bit of something when I leave, and I pity the man who tried to write just how beautiful it is, even in a whole book, for he'd never show it right."

The plain gold of the great Pagoda forms the best possible setting for the thousands of elaborate, aspiring, flame-like peaks and points of the smaller shrines and tazoungs, which ascend about its base like the very tongues of countless prayers, and the shimmer of their mirror-work is like the jewels of some Midasian Emperor. When the breeze blows the silver, bronze, and gold bells which fringe their sundry crowns or htis of wrought metal sound like the murmur of the worshippers' voices wafted upwards.

Facing Kate were two Buddhas the size of tall men, seated upon alabaster and painted thrones, in the action of renouncing, beneath large silk umbrellas oddly fringed with paper lace; but all being white, the effect was good. By the rail of carven wood lacquered and gilded that rimmed them, knelt a Shan lady, clad in a rich blue velvet tamein, and upon the third altar, between the larger Buddhas, where sat enthroned yet a smaller image, she was laying a pair of exquisite lilies, shikoing her dainty black head to the paved floor of the platform between each murmur of her prayer.

Her servants knelt behind her, clad in gold embroidered jackets and wearing silver-hilted and bound dahs in their shoulder belts, while her maid held her wide yellow straw hat of the finest plait by a silk ribbon.

She rose presently and shuffled along gracefully to the right, towards a large new chapel of the mirror work, whose columns were gleaming in the sun like a fairy palace in Fata Morgana, and whose towering peaked roof was carved in kings, nats, beloos, and processions which it would take Hans Andersen several stories to describe, and I doubt if even he could convey the richness of its colours and gildings, and unexpected riches in the most obscure corners. She slipped up the two low steps like a spirit and threw herself before the great Buddha it held, and then the little maid lighted some joss in the elegant brass jars on the lower altar, with its old-gold-coloured silk cloth, and one of the men returned from a flower-stall with more lilies, which he cast at his lady's feet, for her to place upon the altar.

Kate, fascinated by the graceful, poetic doings, had followed her, and, suddenly feeling a vague desire to join in, dropped on her knees and leaned forward, looking up at the calm white smile upon the Buddha's face with wonder and a certain odd restfulness, and then the little Shan lady turned and smilingly edged aside, making room for her on the pretty red and black matting beside her.

It was impossible to refuse her polite gesture, and Kate bowed over when she did, and then laid her jessamine beside her lilies with a sad smile, thinking that for her there was no consolation such as her neighbour seemed to find in her devotions. A touch on her skirt made her turn, to see that Paul had crept in and was holding to her the little paper flags. Entering into the spirit of the moment, she took them from the boy, and thrust them carefully into the low golden rail rimming the altar. Then she rose, and with a bow to her amiable fellow pilgrim, went out into the sunshine again, and walked towards the next shining group of shrines. She stopped short and looked back at the tazoung, however, for two Buddhist nuns, clad in the creamy robe and with shorn heads, were shikoing gently to the door before entering.

"Who built that tazoung, Paul? Ask someone," she said.

Paul gaped round, and, seeing no one likely, was setting off towards a poonjee just about to enter the stairway, when suddenly a tall young Burmese policeman with a tray of tuberoses poised on one hand stopped him with:

"Do not trouble the poonjee, oh Madrasi. This tazoung was made by the piety of Moung Nyohn, a contractor to the great firm of Zinc Brothers, the timber lords, from his savings."

He spoke Burmese, and Paul translated thus,

[*Photo by Author.*

THE CHINESE TAZOUNG.

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"It was built by Zinc Brothers," when the policeman interrupted him with an impatient "Tch! Are you the child of a parrot? It was made by a good contractor, lady," in his excellent police-English. "One Moung Nyohn constructed this erection. Had made much economy and therefore was pious. There is a plate which makes know his worthy act on the side. See!"

He led the way to the side, where a neat brass plate let into the wall set forth the chapel's history.

Kate thanked him, and he continued:

"Why does the lady walk in the sunlight so strong? It would be made cold if she went the other way round the chapel, by way of the Chinese erection."

He walked a few steps in front as if he led the way on a march, and she followed him, idly thinking he might show her something she had not noticed alone.

He stopped under the shadow of the lovely little temple of the Chinese worshippers beneath the green background of feathery trees with its fluted roof magnificent with vermilion and gold, and its sprawling dragons decking the eaves in writhing undulations and its lintel sign of clear letters woven into an embroidered lengthwise hung banner. Before the celestial-looking Buddha behind its railing of square-cut columns,

Kate stopped, and, seeing there were black bronze stands for joss by the smoking rice and saffron censers, would have put in one or two of her joss-sticks, but her escort made a gentle negative motion.

"The lady had better put those in a Burmese chapel—their perfume is not so agreeable to the Chinese congregation," he said politely.

Kate smiled. His English was so good and his manner so polite that she wondered where he could have learned it.

"Certainly. Please show me the right place further on," she said gravely, and they turned and walked to the left, Paul trotting behind, not at all jealous at having been supplanted as guide, his native laziness finding it rather an improvement. An old monk squatted on the pavement of the broad platform, between the inner and outer circles of tazoungs, beneath a yellow umbrella mounted on a high stick; one wrinkled hand held a triangular gong, the other a deer's horn, and before him a handkerchief was spread for alms, and his strangely shaped begging bowl of lacquer, containing his food, like a round pyramid stood by it.

The young policeman threw two annas upon it, and the ancient tapped the goung solemnly but said no word of thanks.

Beyond him a wooden stand with a carved roof held great earthenware water-pots for the

[*Photo by Author.*

THE LARGEST BUDDHA IN THE SHWE DAGON.

thirsty, kept cool from the sun by curtains of woven grass; this was neighboured by a big clapperless bell swung from high posts, and on the ground lay the usual horns to strike it.

Kate looked up at the blue sky and the waving palms and mohur trees which made fair fretwork against it, jewelled by the gold spires and many-hued roofs, with a sigh of pure artistic pleasure. Then a pretty human touch was added by a mild-faced Chinese lady, in her blue silk jade-buttoned coat and darker trousers and white shoes, hobbling along on the arm of a Burmese girl, in pale pink, towards her shrine, and her little boy, a miniature of his father, in a brocade suit and tiny pigtail, hand in hand with a wee Burmese maiden, the very copy of her mother, clad in heliotrope.

Kate's young guide turned aside and indicated the extreme left, and she saw the largest Buddha in the Shwe, the colossal white and yellow serenity that sits for ever meditating under tall palms, backed by two snowy little pagodas and with a tiny tazoung crouching behind it like a disciple. Standing by it, her head, and even her parasol, did not reach to its knee, but she had short space to muse, for the youth led her on northwards, under the whispering trees, towards an older chapel of Mindon Min's time, with the redwood showing through the old gilt of the carvings, and a quiet altar decked with old embroideries, some almost dropping from to-

gether, though there were fresh candles upon it, and a pagoda slave was sweeping away the leaves that had drifted on the floor.

"This, lady, was my mother's father's tazoung. He acquired much merit in his day," he said with proper pride. "Will the lady offer here her perfumes?"

He went in and threw upon the alabaster shelf his scented offering, and as the flowers dropped, he sank down and shikoed silently, heedless of Kate or any passers-by; and seemed quaintly incongruous in his modern khaki before that old-world shrine.

He looked up at the Teacher, who is supposed (theologically) to be incapable of granting any personal supplication, but who is thus illogically prayed to by the Burman when troubles outweigh dogma, and Kate saw that tears were running down his face as he swayed to and fro.

He rose abruptly, and wiped his eyes with a clean regulation handkerchief, and seemed about to speak, when her woman's sympathy, breaking down the barriers of discretion, forestalled him. So here too there was trouble—but what could it be, to move a smart young policeman to this extent?

"You seem in trouble—I hope your prayer will be given you," she said.

"I am much afraid, lady. It is a very terrible thing."

"Will you not tell me?" she asked. "I also am in grief."

He looked at the sweet sadness of her mouth and found confidence.

"Lady, it is my wife—I have lost her—I pray that she may return to me."

"She is dead? Or has she run away?" asked Kate, puzzled by the phrase.

"She left me, lady, to live with a white gentleman while I was away making war upon the Wa people, who live in the hills, with the expedition. I was made sergeant for my assistance to Government—but now she will not come back to me, and I love her muchly. I have spoken with her, and still she makes me foolish—she loves me no more, I am sure. It is my great disaster—as Mister Dolany would say, it is for my Original Sin that she went away."

"Did Mr Dolany teach you such good English? You speak better than any Burman I have heard," she queried sympathetically.

"Mr Dolany was real kind," with a sudden Yankee twang. "He kept the 'Merican Baptist Missen School, and I was junior teacher for a long time. It was he who married us and baptized Ma Twai Glay before the wedding—in the river."

Kate started at the name, as a lightning idea flashed through her mind and as quickly faded, for she thought there must be many

girls of the name in Burma. Yet she quietly continued :

" Then you are a mission scholar ? And come to the Pagoda still ? "

" Lady, I am a follower of the law, through my mother, who was Burmese girl of good learning. But since my pains I follow her law again—for the teaching of Mr Dolany has not helped me spiritually," he added, in his quaint, precise accents. " For still she will not leave her white lover——"

" But if you are her husband you can surely compel her ? "

" No, lady, if Ma Twai Glay loves Mister M'Rosse more than me she would never come back—ah—you are ill ? "

The smooth columns of the tazoung, the flower-strewn stone, the waving trees seen through the arch, all danced a frantic waltz before Kate's thundershaken vision.

" Say it again—the white man's name—please ! No, I am all right—quick ! "

" It is Mr M'Rosse. He lived with her in Up Country——" said the alarmed Moung Than, as she sank down in a heap before the Buddha on the stones.

She raised her hands before its smiling visage, as wildly as any believer could have done, in her excitement, and then leapt to her feet and caught the young man's hand.

"Oh, it can't be true!" she cried. "*You* Ma Twai's husband? When were you married—where?"

"Why, lady? But we were joined in holy matrimony by Mr Dolany, misse'nary at Kyiang Lon, and it must be about two years back—yes, two rains—June twenty-four, it was—Mr Dolany wrote it himself in the Bible he gave me. Oh yes, she is my wife, but she said she was married even more firm to Mr M'Rosse——"

His convincing staccato sentences were oil to her hopes' fires. He looked at her, not daring to draw away the hand she gripped, and very embarrassed.

The place swam about her bewildered head, and yet she could scarcely credit her hearing. She relaxed her clasp quickly, and framed another panting question.

"Tell me everything—how did you leave Ma Twai? Why? Have you seen her again?"

"I wrote to her, and the letter was sent to me by the post office with 'Deceased—undelivered' marked on the outside," said Moung Than, and then in a few words he related his meeting with his errant wife, and her false promises to return to him—even to the pathetic scene of last night, and with every sound he uttered Kate's longing ears drank hope.

She stood like a tranced devotee before that strange altar, and then, as of instinct, turned to look at the shrine door and the free blue of the

morning skies outside. She stepped a yard or two forward, and the great gold central spire showed, soaring upward, like a triumphal cry of joy to her swift imagination.

She could not believe that she was awake, as the brown youth's quaintly correct language marched forth like the sentences in a child's reader, and his flashing black eyes sought hers for sympathy in his woes.

This meeting seemed too miraculous, too wonderful to be real, and then suddenly her jarred heart gave way under the relief, and she sat upon a column base and wept like April rain, with wild, low laughter running through her tears like sunshine, and only came to herself again at his start of surprise and horrified look. He must think her suddenly insane. Hastily she pulled herself together, and sought for the words most useful to convey explanation in a moment to him.

"I am the lover of Mr M'Rosse—I am his betrothed wife," she said. "I came to Rangoon to marry him, and found that he was married to Ma Twai, and my heart was broken! I was like you—I had lost my love, and now, if you are really married to Ma Twai, this will return our loved ones again. The Buddha—or my Lord—or our gods and teachers—have given us our own again! It is very good!" she concluded, in a jumble.

"Oh, lady! You are the wife of Mr M'Rosse? Ma Twai mine again? Ahmeh! Ahmeh! It cannot be true—it is too much!"

The joy that flamed in his face as he grasped her meaning was a match for that high ecstasy that lighted hers.

They stood there, brown policeman and white lady, and stared enraptured at each other, all their thoughts dancing mad joy measures, and both believing for several moments that they were the sport of some deluding happy dream.

Moung Than realised that this fair thakinma came to claim his wife's lover, like some victorious Pwe princess of old, his faith in the ruling race undoubting that she could surely break any marriage bonds which Ma Twai claimed on Ian. Kate knew that, if the Baptist's Mission had blessed her rival's union it was a legal bond; and, moreover, like a lurid lantern flash in a dark corner, Moung Than's tale of Ma Twai's deceit and mockery of Ian's kindness snapped the tie of any pity which might have held him indebted to her.

The time and place had overcome any difference in station and race, and they were just a man and woman who had found their whole happiness. She held out her hand to him to shake as frankly as if he had been a European, while Paul looked stupidly on, wondering if they had suddenly lost their wits by the devil-

ments of these Burmese gods, who worked such sorceries, he had been told by the Romish Fathers whose mission he had attended.

Moung Than, recollecting the manners of his superior officers, shook Kate's hand most correctly, adding a smart salute as an afterthought, and wished that he knew the proper phrase for the occasion, but she spoke quickly :

" We must go right away and find Mr M'Rosse and General Iden and tell them—everybody ! " she cried, and would have left the little tazoung, but with another respectful salute he checked her.

" Please, lady, let me give thanks to the Teacher," he said, and fell down, shikoing ardently before his grandfather's Buddha.

And Kate, with a quick realisation of the unity of all good gods, however named, knelt also by him and offered thanks for her wonderful deliverance—and, without, the sunshine of the radiant golden day was waiting for her once more.

CHAPTER XXV

FREEDOM

An hour later there was silence for a moment among the joyful group under the mohur trees before General Iden's bungalow.

Uncle Jim had pulled Kate down upon the arm of his long chair and held her fingers, looking up into her glowing eyes with unclouded relief.

Aunt Nora, like a schoolgirl, was playing ball with her handkerchief, and throwing bits of sugar to her pet monkey, which skipped over table and chairs; while Moung Than stood smartly at attention, his eyes fixed upon General Iden, who weighed his pince-nez and stroked his moustache as he keenly questioned the young Burman.

Then he spoke, and his four hearers were alert.

"It seems to me that the best thing we can do is to let Moung Than go with me to claim his wife now. He says he has the Bible with the entry of his marriage in it at his quarters, and no doubt the Mission registers can be easily

obtained,—copies of each branch's books at their depôt here in Rangoon. We could call as we go along. But I'm sure of the fact now, practically. Moung Than *is* Ma Twai's husband."

"Wait a bit," said Uncle Jim slowly, "it's no use letting Ian be present at the interview. It would be very painful for him if Ma Twai makes a scene. She's sure to. Send your orderly with a chit from Kate asking Ian to come to the bungalow here, and then you, and Moung Than, and I will all go round to the Mission and on to Ma Twai in the hotel after. Don't you agree with me, Auntie?"

Then Moung Than spoke.

"I have the General thakin's leave to speak? Yes? I am sure that my wife will return to me when her passion for this gentleman has died out. But she must leave him now. I think if I am left with her for a little time I can make her see reason. Women are foolish like that." (He wondered at the smiles of Kate and her aunt.) "But they know their duties when they come to think much. I am sure Ma Twai will be too proud to remain now that she knows he loves the lady here."

None of them thought it well to undeceive him by admitting that Ma Twai and Kate had met, and the General coughed, rose, and called for paper and ink; and then Kate wrote the letter to bring Ian to her.

When Ma Twai rose that morning, triumph had cried a welcome dawn chant in her ears. Ian had never spoken a word until he was dressed, when suddenly he turned and said :

" You can pack up your things, Ma Twai. We are going back by the train to Mandalay this evening to catch the boat up to Mingaing to-morrow."

She hardly seized her joy for the first instant, and then, as she realised that she had won, and Ian was taking her away with him to the forest—leaving her rival and Moung Than behind in Rangoon,—she clapped her hands with glee, and cracked her finger-joints like her mother. It relieved her of the painful need of ridding herself of Moung Than that night—though she had got the little white tabloids safely in her thanaka box, having purloined them when Ian had fallen into an uneasy doze in the small hours. Let Moung Than follow them to Mingaing—there would be plenty of ways to silence him there—plenty of hard-up wild men to be bribed with a bracelet to do murder or worse.

She laughed often as she laid her tameins together and tied up in silk squares the many odds-and-ends beloved of the Burmese woman to pack in her box, and had her delightful chota hazri of tea and toast, quite easy in her mind for the future.

They were going back to the Forest, and Ian

would still give her gifts and her proud position as his wife. She had vanquished her enemy—tricked Moung Than, the fool who thought he could win her back from her will.

Ma Twai was happy as a flitting butterfly as she prepared to depart, and was just wondering if it would be safe to ask Ian for some money and go to the bazaar to spend it before she left, when Than Dine knocked and entered with a letter, which Ian opened and read hastily.

Then Ma Twai saw that his forehead was wet with sudden perspiration, and his face sterner than ever.

"Is something wrong?" she asked anxiously. "You look ill."

"I hope not. But I must go at once—to see something. I may not be back to tiffin. You have yours even if I am late, and be sure to be ready for the train."

He folded up the note, put it in his pocket, and went out, leaving her to wonder.

Kate, on Uncle Jim's advice, said nothing but "Ian, dear,—Can you come to me for half an hour this morning, at once. I must see you.—KATE,"—knowing that he would rush off, leaving the coast clear for Moung Than's arrival.

Ma Twai had just finished her packing, and squatted down for a comfortable betel-chew, when Than Dine knocked again.

"There is the big General thakin and another

thakin to see you, Ma Twai, and they wish to come up here, if you are dressed," he said, with a very puzzled air.

"I will receive them here," she replied very haughtily, with a proud idea that they might have come to call on her, as white men did upon each other's wives, forgetting that the hour was too early for a formal politeness of the sort.

She gave a touch to her hair and seated herself in a chair, intending to rise as they entered as she had seen ladies do in the hotel, but when the door opened she saw a sight that so petrified her that she remained glued to her seat for a breathless, awful moment.

Behind the General's broad khaki-covered shoulders rose a familiar turban and head—and Moung Than, her ghost, her nightmare, stepped into the room.

There was a second's terrible silence, and then Moung Than spoke, his features showing an odd mixture of hope, fear, and authority:

"Ma Twai, my heart, I am come to ask you my great desire, that you return to me," he said in Burmese, which the General understood, and Uncle Jim guessed the import of his words.

But Ma Twai gathered up her scattered senses magnificently.

"What do you mean, fellow? I will never return to you!" she said, bold as a bazaar

maiden. "Why are these thakins with you? How dare you come here troubling me?"

"I am afraid it is because your husband has the *right* to come here," said General Iden, politely but firmly. "You see, Ma Twai, I fear you did *not* know what you were doing when you married Thakin M'Rosse. You were already the wife of Moung Than and had not divorced him——"

"It is a lie!" said Ma Twai, and went ghastly yellow. "We were never married. We had no marriage feast before the elders—and they tell me lovers do not matter if one marries properly after—as Ian and I were. I am Ian's wife! Moung Than is a liar!"

"I am afraid you *were* married to Moung Than, because the missionaries wrote it down in their book and their marriages are fast-binding in the laws," said the General quietly. "Besides, it is very sad to forsake a fine young man like Moung Than, who had never annoyed you in any way." His tone was that of a kindly magistrate counselling a disorderly person not to come there again, but Ma Twai did not notice this.

Her rage was heating fast, and presently got the better of her.

"He is a fool," she said hotly. "Therefore I left him! Who sent you here to meddle with my affairs? Where is Ian, my husband?"

"You are very foolish, girl," said the General

calmly. "You have now admitted you lived with Moung Than, since you say you left him! I was giving you the chance to return to him with grace—take it. As for our coming, Moung Than met Miss Iden and told her he was your husband, —so that you must see that we had good cause for coming to you at once."

Dismay flapped its grey wings about Ma Twai's whirling head.

Still she stuck to her guns as tightly as ever a dacoit does to his jingal, when the police have him at bay in the jungle.

"That does not matter," she said boldly. "Whatever Moung Than says, I am Ian's wife, and may not be put away. He has no cause to divorce me, and if he tries, then *I* have *my* rights and will give *nothing* up until it has been tried in court and decree pronounced."

It will be seen that Ma Twai had been talking to the office Babu, or else she had never dared to front these white thakins so bravely.

"Little spitfire," said the General in English to Uncle Jim, rapidly translating her words. "I have given her the chance to retire gracefully, and now she's threatening us with *her* legal rights! It's *too* funny, but it's very awkward. I didn't want to have to threaten her back, but since *that's* her spirit, I must tell her the unpleasant truth, that she's committed bigamy."

"You had better go away, Moung Than,"

said Ma Twai insolently. "This is my room, and when Ian comes in he will throw you out! Go away now!—Than Dine!"

She clapped her hands to summon her servant, when the General stopped her with a gesture of such command that she halted in spite of herself.

"I am very sorry to have to say this to you, Ma Twai—I had hoped you would be a good girl and take back Moung Than—but since you force me to tell you, I must speak. You are not Ian's wife—and when a woman marries two husbands under the English law, she can be imprisoned for so doing, like a thief. I can send for the police, and you can be taken to the jail now, if Moung Than likes to consent to it. You have the chance to leave Ian thakin quietly, and he will not send you to prison—he is too good to do so, but he *can* if he wills. Take my advice and go away with Moung Than to-day, before Ian thakin returns here even. It will be much the best. They might cut your pretty hair in jail, Ma Twai—and the work is very hard."

She glared furiously round like a leopardess taken in a trap, and clenched her little brown hands as if she were strangling Moung Than, and then she spat at him with a sign of the worst contempt.

"You dog! You have brought me to this! You have ruined me! I will *never, never* live with you again! Madman! Kullah! Fetch Ian

thakin, and we will see who is lying now! I do not believe *any* of you! I *am* his wife!"

General Iden felt almost nonplussed for a minute, but, to his surprise, Moung Than took a firm part, and cut through the strain.

He looked at his wife with a face as disdainful as hers.

"All right—have your way, Ma Twai. But since you no longer love me I will have my rights too. You can go to jail, and I shall claim damages from Ian thakin for having carried you off. Then I shall get the money and you will have to work with thieves and harlots in the prison! Let some constables be fetched, sir," he added to the General, turning away his face so that she did not see the significant look he gave the latter.

The General saw his stratagem in a flash, and played up to it ably.

He opened the door and called for his orderly, whom he had told to wait at the hotel after delivering Kate's note, and, while the man was coming up the stairs from the hall, turned to Ma Twai.

"Then it is decided, Ma Twai? I shall send for the police and have you arrested, and Moung Than will accuse you before the magistrate this afternoon? Very well. You have chosen!"

He slipped rapidly out of the door and pretended to talk to the orderly, leaving her open-

mouthed, staring at Moung Than, who twisted his moustache indifferently and looked at Uncle Jim.

"It will take the constables about twenty minutes to get here," he said in his careful English to him. "Please, sir, stand before the window, and I will guard the door. Ma Twai may wish to escape before they come."

He moved smartly to the door and stood there with his back to it.

She gave a long look at his stern face and another at the white man's as they moved, and knew she was lost! With a sharp shriek she threw herself on the floor, sobbing wildly, her defences gone, her pride in the dust.

In that hour she had lost both her position, her gains, and her liberty, and regained the man who had wearied her! Dismal pictures of the jail flitted before her and of the humiliation of being made to work in a common cotton lungi—no shoes; it was unthinkable, and she tore madly at her lovely hair as she writhed upon the dusty polished floor.

Suddenly there were steps outside, and General Iden opened the door; but before he could come in, Ma Twai, wildly thinking the steps those of the police, made a dash for the dressing-table, grabbed one of Ian's razors, and in a second had opened and held it to her panting throat.

"You shall never take me alive!" she cried sharply. "Keep away, or I will cut——"

A light of terror shone in Moung Than's dark eyes. He had overacted his part, and the drama threatened to become a dread tragedy; but he was quick as she, and turned beseechingly to the General and Uncle Jim:

"Please, sirs, if you were to leave me with her I think it would be better! Wait, Ma Twai, wait—I will never let any police have you but me! Put down that knife—hear me—I will do all you desire—I will give you your freedom—but oh, my Ma Twai—I love you—I love you—do not leave me by death! Live and forsake me, sooner!"

He advanced towards her with all his sternness cast off, his hands outstretched imploringly to her and shaking almost as violently as her own.

"Beloved, your will conquers—I will do whatever you like—I will take you home to Mingaing to-day—and you shall send me away then if you will—but do not kill yourself! My Ma Twai—my heart! Stop—I will never hurt you!"

Uncle Jim and the General slipped quietly out, and as the door closed they saw that Ma Twai had sunk in a little heap on the ground, and that her hands were blindly outheld to meet her husband's loving clasp, as he stooped over her, murmuring tender things.

"Thank goodness!" said the General, mopping his hot forehead outside. "By the time they

arrive at Mingaing, that young fellow will have won her back. Egad! He's the most tactful Burman I ever saw! I shall name him for promotion to his chiefs! Let's go and get a drink—most exhausting scene! Then we'll look after Kate and Ian!"

And as they made for the hotel bar they met Donalbain, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the telling of the thrilling news, and watching its effect upon the big Scot, whose loosened laughter fairly shook the glasses when he grasped that Ian was free.

Meanwhile, Ian in his rattling gharry jolted towards the Idens' bungalow, inwardly dreading the sight of Kate's pain, for he thought that only another breakdown before their parting could explain that hasty note at so early an hour. But he answered to that call immediately, anxious to give her all the comfort in his power.

He too had passed a terrible night, but the dawn had brought him a clear sight of his duty, and he braced himself to meet it as valiantly as ever his ancestors had done the forlorn hope at Culloden.

At first he had rebelled fiercely against the fetters which had fallen upon him, and felt that he must break them or go mad, but as his saner sense spoke, it told him the folly of resistance for the present.

Ma Twai's whole behaviour had shown him

that she would never release him willingly, and if he left her at once she would promptly seek legal redress and drag Kate into a painful scandal; yet to stay with her now felt impossible, very desecration of his love for Kate!

Grimly he remembered the evening at the Mingaing pagoda—how gentle, how idyllic and sweet Ma Twai had seemed,—and now the reality was this prosaically mercenary little creature, whose delights were dress, money, and petty authority! Quick visions of his future with her rose, and he knew that it crushed all his ambitions and plans to regain for himself the position and wealth that the years had washed away from his Highland forebears, since he would no longer have the heart to work on under his load. True, there had been isolated instances of men happily married to Burmese girls, but they had not been men of Ian's determined ambitions—they had been content to stay in the East, and rear their children indifferently in the brown wife's ways, and also these wives had been better educated than Ma Twai, who had only her wild grace and daintiness for her dower.

Had Kate not arrived now, he would doubtless have endured her in a dull resignation, and, by dogged devotion to work in the jungle, have borne the monotony till the years had hardened him into indifference. But Kate's coming drove out all hope of such compromise with destiny,

for his every instinct would revolt from morning till night against his bondage.

No! No! He could never stay on with her! The law might give her his name, and alimony as his wife, but it could enforce no more! He would arrange with Donalbain for his share of the jade, and with it buy some lonely little plantation in Ceylon and live there alone until Ma Twai consented to free him!

Meanwhile, he must take her safely up river to Ma See, away from Rangoon and Kate . . . whom, to-day, he must try to cheer with what hopes he could. . . .

Now he stepped from the gharry and mounted the bungalow steps, but, seeing no one on the veranda, he walked along its east corner. This side under its cool green chicks was Mrs Iden's favourite nook, for it got the comparatively cool brightness of the morning sun, tempered by a strong electric punkah which hummed like a great soft moth above a long lounge gay with blue-and-white silk cushions.

A purdah of Chinese beads divided it off from the rest of the veranda, and, as Ian neared it, he saw through its chinks what made him pause in bewilderment for quite a minute.

In a long deck-chair lay Kate, smiling and humming a little tune to herself, and (a sure sign of glee with her) tossing up and catching on her foot again one dainty slipper!

The soft sky-colour of her clinging ninon dress brightened the bronze-gold flecks in her chestnut hair and threw up to perfection the rosy glow of her cheeks. Not the pale, miserable ghost of last night sat there, but the Kate of three years ago! She was joyously planning how to announce her news, and just as he alighted from the gharry an idea had pleased her—a very dramatic and appropriately Scottish one.

On the table by her stood a small bottle of champagne which Aunt Nora had insisted upon opening, to "quieten her nerves after Moung Than's shock," as she merrily phrased it.

Kate had sipped half a glass with her, and now, as Ian silently watched her behind the purdah, he saw her fill it up and drop in a lump of ice, smiling radiantly as she did it.

In wild astonishment he gave a startled "Oh!" and instantly she swung back the purdah and lifted the glass in her other hand.

"Ian, dear, I'm drinking a health!" she cried gaily.

"Kitty! What is the matter? Are you crazy?" a sudden sharp fear for her reason snatching at him.

"No—don't care if I am! You must drink it with Highland honours, too—throw the glass over your left shoulder—now! Here's to Ma Twai Glay's first real husband—Sergeant Moung Than of the Burma Police—whom she

married at Kyiang Lon two years before she met you!"

For one dazzled second he stared at her, and then, as his brain seized the divine meaning of her words, his hand mechanically took the glass from hers.

"Drink it!" ordered Kate happily, and the empty glass crashed behind him in dancing diamonds on the tiles.

"Darling—it can't be true! Oh, do explain!" he stammered amazedly.

And Kate explained!

THE END

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